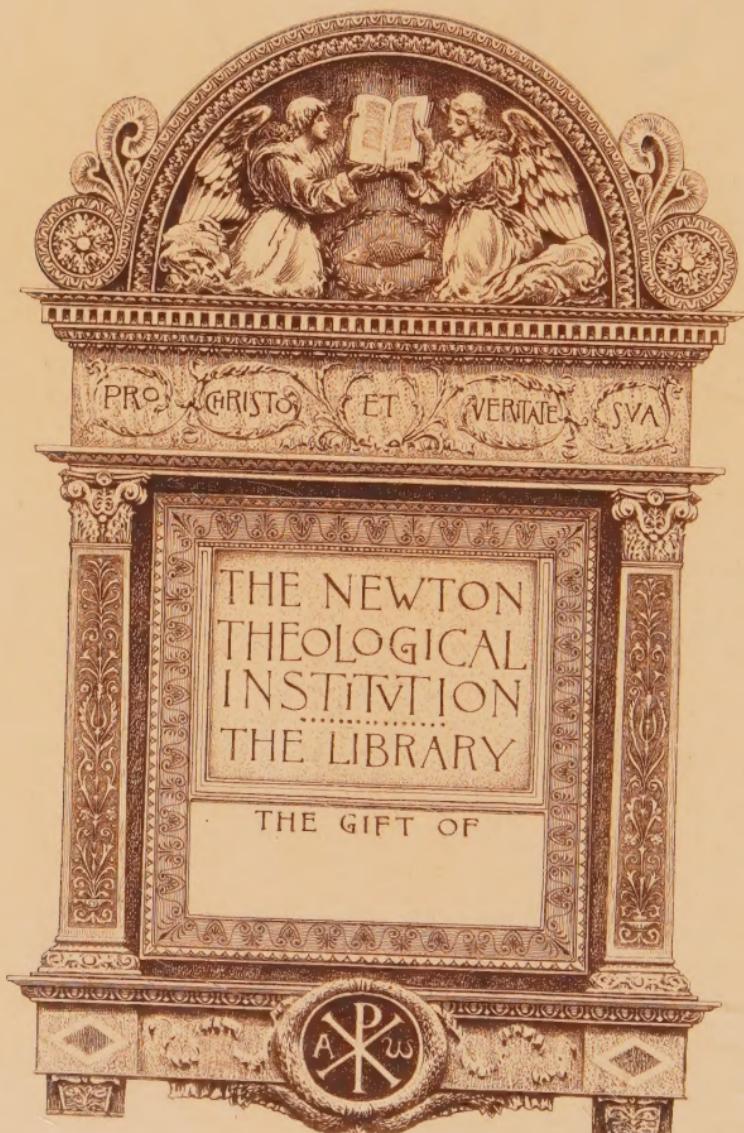


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SIX RADICAL THINKERS

BENTHAM, J. S. MILL, COBDEN,
CARLYLE, MAZZINI,
T. H. GREEN

BY

JOHN MAC CUNN, LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

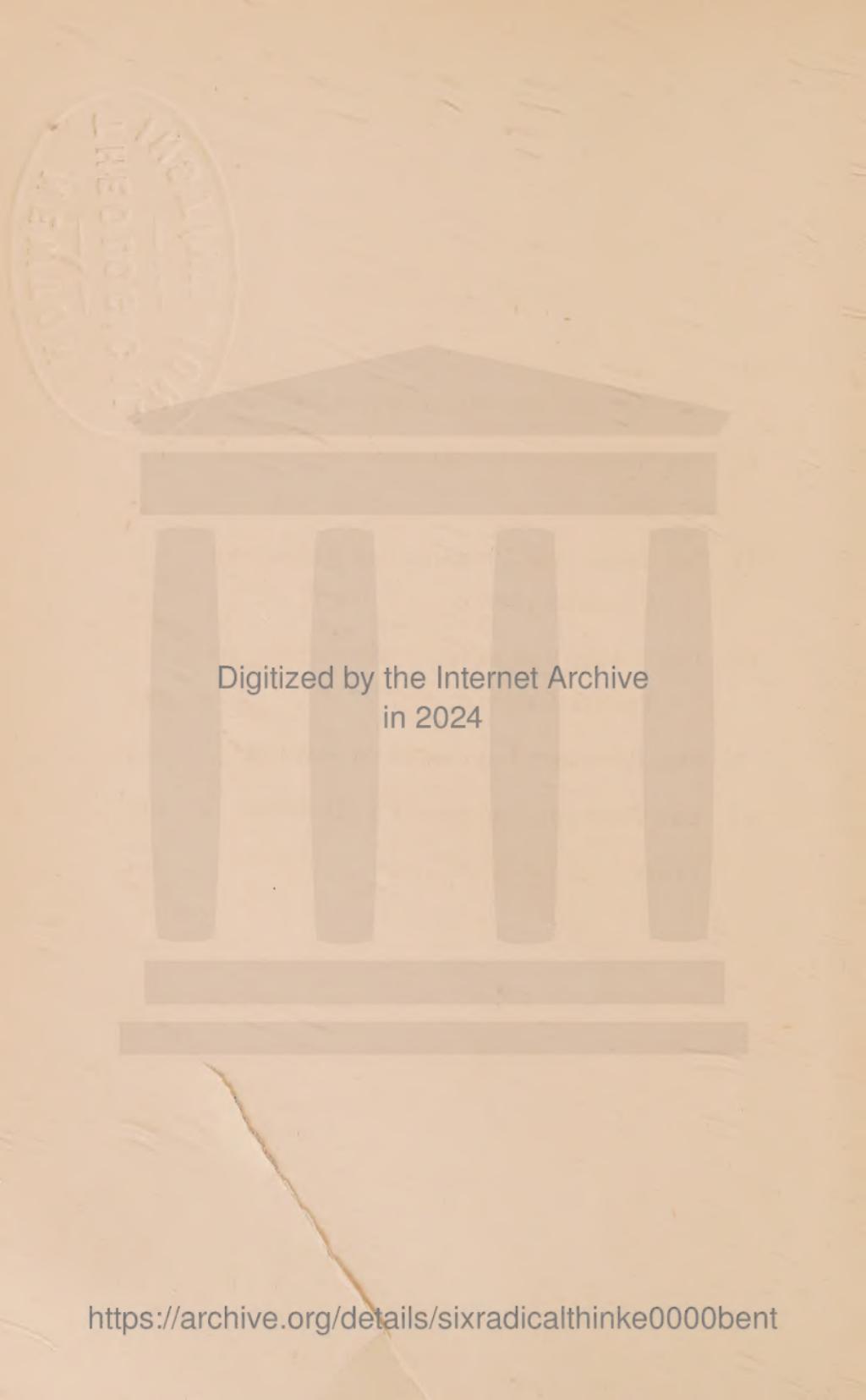
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JEREMY BENTHAM

A

BENTHAM AND HIS PHILOSOPHY OF REFORM

“UNDER a government of good laws,” asks Bentham, “what is the motto of a good citizen ?” He answers: “To obey punctually, to censure freely”; and few men have more faithfully lived up to their words.

It began early. “I learnt nothing,” he says of his undergraduate days at Oxford. “We just went to the foolish lectures of our tutors to be taught something of logical jargon.”* But he said worse things of his university than this. It is an often-told story how, against scruples of conscience, he was constrained to affix the necessary signature to the Thirty-nine Articles, then exacted at the beginning of a university career. He was then but twelve and a half: possibly the college authorities may have thought the boy made too much of his conscience, and too little of the Articles. Yet we know, from his own words, that on that precocious and sensitive mind an impression was made which lasted for life. He said many bitter things about Tests in his lifetime; one was that the streets of Oxford were “paved with perjury.” Nor did the social opportunities, so justly prized in the life of the old universities, make amends for other disgusts. He had

* Bowring’s “Life of Bentham” is a quarry of material both in respect of life and doctrines.

fellow-students of course. But short is their shrift: "They were all either stupid or dissipated." His final experience of the university was in keeping. After graduating he returned (*ætat* 16) to attend the lectures of Blackstone—and in due course to do his best, in his "Fragment on Government," to demolish the lecturer.

It is the same story when he passed from the university to the bar. He had no liking for the profession to begin with; and very soon, as he tells us, he did his best to "put to death," and not without success, the cases which his anxious father had, as a solicitor, thrown in his way. He and his practice parted, with willingness on both sides. But there is a sequel. If the reader will turn to the copious index to Bowring's edition of "Bentham's Works," he will find under the head, "Lawyers," the following among other items:—

Lawyers, interest of, in the incognoscibility of the law.

- " Mendacity licence of.
- " The only persons in whom ignorance of the law is not punished.
- " Least of all men exposed to the operations of humanity.
- " Opinion of, that cheap justice is bad, and dear justice good.
- " Knowledge of, confined to the corrupt part of human nature.
- " Accessories to the crimes they defend.
- " Their interest in technical jargon.

The last item is even more eloquent:—

Lawyers, incidentally animadverted on (with 156 citations).

It had been the dearest ambition of Bentham's pushing father to educate his son to be a great lawyer. He even, we know, had views, which the astonishing precocity of the boy might well justify, of the woolsack. But sons dispose where fathers propose. The product was the most subversive critic that English law and lawyers have ever had to encounter.

It was not otherwise when he came to mix in society. When he left the bar he seemed to have passed into the obscurity of failure: his father, he tells us, was “always out of spirits for my want of success.” But he was working, he was producing, and it was in the theory of the very subject in which all his acquaintance had set him down as a final failure. The result was the “Fragment on Government,” published in 1776, when its author was 28. And with this came the recognition and the friendship of the Whig, Lord Shelburne. It was a friendship he regarded with life-long gratitude, as one of the prime movers in his life; and among the many things it did for him was (in words of his own) to “raise him from the pit of humiliation,” and to bring him into society, and especially, of course, into the society of public men.

These Whigs, it is evident, did not think much of him. They laughed at him, they made jokes at his expense, and he could not retaliate in kind. For, with all his intractability, he was in society a timid and bashful man, with a bashfulness that “clung to him like a cold garment all through life”; and to the end of his days he gave little sign in conversation of the explosiveness of his mind and opinions. But this is what, when he was 70, he wrote down in that memorandum book to which, as to a faithful friend, he confided all his inmost feelings. “J. Bentham’s knowledge of the world, Whig lords, &c. Those who live with them, and by describing their doings, and looking at their titles, pretend to know what they are—know only what they say. I who might have lived with them, and would not live with them, and who neither know nor care what they say, know (and without living with them) what they think.” And if we turn

to his second work, "The Principles of Morals and Legislation," which was completed under Shelburne's roof, we shall search in vain for any vestige of that softening influence which Whig drawing-rooms have been sometimes supposed to exercise even upon radical thinkers. The truth is that society was not made for him, nor he for society ; and as years went on he settled down to do his work in an ever-increasing seclusion. "As for people at large, I want little of their company and much of their esteem." He wrote this when he was 23, and it was truer of him every day he lived. Once, in later times, when Madame de Staël came to London, she sent a message through his friend and editor, Dumont: "Tell Bentham I will see nobody till I have seen him." "Sorry for it," said Bentham, "for then she will see nobody."

It is easy to say that in all this there is much that is deplorable. This determination from Oxford days onwards to set himself for ever in opposition, and to smash every idol he was expected to worship, shut his mind, narrowed his experience, impoverished his life, distorted his world. His contractedness of mind is incredible. He found Socrates "insipid." Plato was to him "a philosophy of words." He called Burke "a madman" ; and Johnson a "vamper of commonplace morality." He wished that Goldsmith had never written "The Deserted Village." He defined poetry as "misrepresentation" ; and even in his own subject declared that "before Montesquieu all was unmixed barbarism." He is, in brief, not only one of the greatest but one of the most limited of Englishmen. He thought much in his day, and wrote much about prisons—himself all the while an unconscious prisoner within spiritual walls that shut out life. Be it so. We need

not say it, because his greatest disciple, the younger Mill, has, in the best of his essays, said it for us with sufficient emphasis. But, then, this fitted him for his work. For it gave him two qualities without which he could never have been, in his manhood, the great subversive critic of English Law, and, in exuberant old age, the radical reformer of the English Constitution. It gave him the irreverence which is the price which the world has to pay for emancipation—the irreverence of Erasmus when he satirised the monks, of Bacon when he scoffed at the schoolmen, of Pascal when he scathed the Jesuits, of Voltaire when he scoffed at superstition, and of Bentham when he assaulted the Law and the Constitution of England. And to irreverence, impotent enough had it stood alone, it added the self-reliance which enabled its possessor, without support of any institution and with little of the alliance of other minds, to stand up, strongly rooted in himself, against venerated authorities, massive prescription, sinister interest, and prolonged indifference.

Bentham is himself the greatest obstacle to an understanding of the bitterness of his onslaught on the Law of England. He has, by general admission, done so much to make Law what it is, that it has become impossible without special knowledge to realise what before Bentham it was. “I do not know,” says Sir Henry Maine, “a single law reform effected since Bentham’s day which cannot be traced to his influence.” *

It was, of course, inevitable that with the growth of the nation, and with the activity of legislation, English statute law should increase in complexity. No one could better realise this than Bentham himself, who,

* “Early History of Institutions,” p. 397.

in his own handling of the civil and the criminal code, has proved himself one of the greatest masters of detail that ever lived. But, unfortunately, complexity had become confusion. Systematisation had not kept pace with growth. The antiquated and the obsolete had not been shorn away when its day was done; and the new, in a laborious and gigantic patchwork, had been superimposed upon the old. There was progress. The plough, as Mill puts it, was no longer attached to the horse's tail. But then, for form's sake, the tail was still suffered to remain attached to the plough.* "Dearly," he adds, "did the client pay for the cabinet of historical curiosities which he was obliged to purchase every time that he made a settlement of his estate."† A similar thing had happened in Case Law. The recorded decisions of courts had inevitably multiplied an hundredfold, and had gone to swell, or, as Bentham thought, to be entombed in the multitudinous volumes out of which lawyers had to dig their law when they needed it. Add to this a terminology and a phraseology (only recently translated into English) to the last degree prolix and technical, and we can hardly wonder if upon this more than primæval chaos there brooded the spirit of, even to lawyers, an all but impenetrable unintelligibility.

But even this, it would seem, was not the worst. Unintelligibility might have had its advantages. It would have left, at any rate the lay mind in total darkness. But then the darkness was not total. By the free use of "legal fictions," words which seemed to mean something did not mean what they seemed. An acquired non-natural interpretation was put upon them, known doubtless to the legal expert, but mysterious

* "Dissertations and Discussions," pp. 369, 370.

† *Ibid.*

and deceptive to the last degree to the natural understanding of men.* And then, when thus to complexity had been added technicality, and to technicality unintelligibility, and to unintelligibility fiction, there emerged that safeguard of justice with which we are all so familiar: "Ignorance of the law excuses no man."

It was this state of things that Bentham could not tolerate. It was not in his blood to do it. Blind and deaf as he was to whole tracts of human experience, there were some things to which the ways of influence were open indeed. Sincerity, honesty, candour, such as have never been surpassed, were part of his being. "The recollection of that money," he says, recalling a very venial childish departure from perfect straightforwardness, "was like the worm that never dieth within me." "I never told a lie," he once said in the latest years of his long life to Bowring, from whom he hid nothing, "I never in my remembrance did what I knew to be a dishonest thing." This was his native spirit. It fed on all it met—on the memoirs he read, even as a child, of the victims of the law's delay, in which, he tells us, "the demon of chicane appeared to him in all its hideousness": on the extorted tests of Oxford University; on the damning revelations of his brief practice at the bar; on the legal studies of his later life; till at last it broke out in a torrent of denunciation and derision.

"Complication," he cries, "is the nursery of fraud." "Our whole judiciary establishment is one entire mass of corruption."

"The incomprehensibility of the law," he declares in

* "Above all," so runs his words, "the pestilential breath of Fiction poisons the sense of every instrument it comes near." For much in the same vein see introduction to "Rationale of Judicial Evidence."

another not less characteristic vein, “is the very remedy which in its present state preserves society from dissolution.” Yes, because “if rogues did but know all the pains that the law has taken for their benefit, honest men would have nothing left they could call their own.”

“What is a fiction?” he asks. “A falsehood. . . . By whom invented? By judges. On what occasions? On the occasion of their pronouncing a judicial decision. For what purpose? One may conceive two—either that of doing in a roundabout way what they might do in a direct way, or that of doing in a roundabout way what they had no right to do in any way at all.”

We cannot pause upon his illustrations. But here is one presented in his usual fashion:—An innocent son of a father, capitally punished for high treason, was not only deprived of *his father's* goods. By the fiction of *corruption of blood* he could not even inherit from his grandfather. The channel, so ran the law, through which the goods had to pass had been *corrupted*. “This fiction of a sort of original sin serves as a foundation to all this point of law. But why stop there? If, in fact, the father's blood is corrupted, why not destroy the vile offspring of corruption? Why not execute the son at the same time with the father?”

Now it is entirely and even obviously true that in this, and in much else like it, there is ignorance. Bentham has nothing of the historic spirit. The wisdom of our ancestors is to him but “the infantile foolishness of the cradle of the race.” And if he ever wishes to conserve the past at all, it is only that we may learn by its follies, blunders and crimes. His very admirations disclose his limits. For though he admired Montesquieu it was not for the historic spirit

which is the supreme merit of that great pioneer of the historical method. Sir Henry Maine's verdict is unimpeachable. "No geniuses of an equally high order so completely divorced themselves from history as Hobbes and Bentham."*

Not to Bentham, therefore, need we look for the spirit that finds in the natural history of abuses an apology for their survival. Nor for that recognition of social evolution which sees in revolution a sin against organic continuity. Nor for that discovery, so familiar now to the student of comparative law and politics, that men are not made for codes and constitutions, but, contrariwise, codes and constitutions for men. He denounced fictions; but even here he has but delivered himself into the hands of historians of law who have little difficulty in convicting him of "ignorance of the peculiar office of legal fictions in the development of law."†

But then, it was not Bentham's mission to do justice to what was old, nor even to attempt to hold the balance between the old and the new. His task was to prepare the way for whole truths by enforcing partial ones; and, in particular, to subject the law of England to the test of a utility stripped of the last shred of reverence for prescription. It is not for us to lament it. Prescription had friends enough. Even whilst Bentham was busy, the genius of Scott,

"Sole sitting by the shores of old romance,"

was bringing the past to life again, and Burke, on a hundred reverent pages, was telling the world that men would never look forward to posterity who did

* "Early History of Institutions," p. 396.

† Maine, "Ancient Law," p. 27.

not look backward to their ancestors. Who will say that in face of these, the greatest of all the prophets of conservatism, reform in politics as well as in law did not need a champion who forgot to do justice to the past in the passion to do justice to the future?

There are, to be sure, some who think—among them Sir Henry Maine—that both for his own reputation and for the good of his country, Bentham had much better never have gone beyond legal reform. But he had no misgivings himself. At 68, or at most a few years earlier, with that youth in age which characterised him, he threw himself into political reform, and never flagged till, having lived to express his joy at the French Revolution of 1830, he died in 1832, an impenitent radical of nearly 84. Few men have ever, from the quiet haven of a recluse life, more striven to act upon the stormy course of politics. He counselled the parliamentary radicals, Cartwright, Burdett, O'Connell, Brougham and others; he drafted their resolutions; he inspired the masterful dogmatism of James Mill; he founded the *Westminster Review*; most of all he wrote books which became the Scriptures of philosophical radicalism.* He was not without his opportunity. When he turned to politics, the first line of radical assault had been repulsed. Burke and the forces of conservatism had carried the day. They had triumphantly “diffused the terror,” with Paris as illustration; and the country had followed them. The watchword of reform, “The Rights of Man,” was discredited—discredited by its sanguinary victory in France, discredited by both practical and

* *E.g.* “The Catechism of Parliamentary Reform” (1817) and “The Constitutional Code” (1830).

controversial defeat in England, Bentham himself had played his part in discrediting it. He gave proof of his radicalism here by doing his best to subvert the foundations on which radicalism had been heretofore supposed to rest. Nor amongst all the phrases he assails is there one which more moves him to denial and derision than "the natural rights of man." Radical Bentham here outdoes conservative Burke. Bitterly as Burke had denounced the revolutionary dogma of abstract rights, it was not the theory he attacked: it was its fanatical applications. Far otherwise with Bentham. He meets the theory of the natural rights of man with the flat denial that man has any natural rights whatever. What man has by nature is inclinations, desires, expectations. These he has in lavish abundance. Nature has seen to that. But of all the rights of man, rights to life, liberty, property, and all the rest which figured in the great American and French Declarations of Rights, man has not one, not even the elementary right to life, till he has received it at the hands of Law. It is Law and Law alone that is the source of rights. For it is Law alone that defines what are the natural inclinations in whose satisfaction it is for the public good that the citizen ought to be protected, as it is likewise Law that defines what are the natural inclinations which ought in the public interest to be repressed if need be by prison and gallows. "Rights properly so called are the creatures of law properly so called; real laws give birth to real rights"—this is the pith of Bentham's teaching about rights.* The teaching, to be sure, is far from unimpeachable. The definition of rights is

* "Theory of Legislation," p. 84. See also "Works," part viii. pp. 497-507, pp. 520-524.

all too narrow. The legal endorsement of a right, the mere inscription of a right in the statute-book, does not create that right. But the very narrowness of the definition serves the more effectually to mark the completeness of Bentham's rupture with the earlier radicalism. The "natural rights," which to it were the foundations of politics, had become to him no better than dogmatic and contemptible "anarchic fallacies."

The result of all this was that when, after the great war, reform began again to raise its head, it found the constitution still standing intact and indeed stronger than ever upon the ruins of the radical theory and buttressed by all the splendid reasoning apology and imaginative panegyric of Burke. Yet, if our century be not a step backward, we cannot well deny that the constitution needed "looking into." Bentham, at any rate, set himself to look into it

There is one of his writings, "The Book of Fallacies," which, considering its permanent applicability to political life, is surprisingly neglected. For it is designed to expose (not so much logical fallacies as) the manifold devices at which privilege, and monopoly, and inertia, and "sinister interest" in all its forms are prone to clutch, if only they might postpone the hour of reform. There are many sections in the volume, and the headings are in themselves often significant of much. Thus, we have, "The wisdom of our ancestors, or Chinese argument;" "The Hobgoblin argument, or no Innovation;" "Official malefactors' screen; Attack me you attack government;" "The Quietist, or 'No complaint' ;" "Snail's-pace argument; 'One thing at a time'; 'Slow and sure,'" and so on.

"The constitution—why must it not be looked into?"

so runs his comment upon our “matchless constitution.” “Why is it that under pain of being *ipso facto* anarchist convict, we must never presume to look at it otherwise than with shut eyes? Because it was the work of our ancestors—of ancestors, of legislators, few of whom could so much as read, and these few had nothing before them that was worth the reading.”

Perhaps his handling of the “Hobgoblin argument” shows him in his most aggressive vein:—

“I am a sinecurist (cries another), who, being in receipt of £38,000 a year, public money, for doing nothing, and having no more wit than honesty, have never been able to open my mouth and pronounce any articulate sound for any other purpose—yet, hearing a cry of ‘No sinecures,’ am come down to join in the chorus of ‘no innovation! ’ ‘Down with the innovators! ’ in hopes of drowning, by these defensive sounds, the offensive ones which chill my blood and make me tremble.

“I am a contractor (cries a third), who, having bought my seat that I might sell my vote, and in return for them, being in the habit of obtaining with the most convenient regularity a succession of good jobs, foresee in the prevalence of innovation the destruction and the ruin of this established branch of trade.

“I am a country gentleman (cries a fourth), who, observing that from having a seat in a certain assembly a man enjoys more respect than he did before—on the turf, in the dog-kennel, and in the stable; and having tenants and other dependents enough to seat me, against their wills, for a place in which I am detested; and hearing it said that if innovation were suffered to run on unopposed, elections would come in time to be as free in reality as they are in appearance and pre-

tence—have left for a day or two the cry of ‘Tally-ho,’ and ‘Hark forward,’ to join in the cry of ‘No anarchy !’ ‘No innovation !’

“ I am a priest (says a fifth), who, having proved the pope to be anti-Christ to the satisfaction of all orthodox divines whose piety prays for the cure of souls, or whose health has need of exoneration from the burthen of residence; and having read in *my* edition of the Gospels that the apostles lived in palaces which innovation and anarchy would cut down to parsonage houses; though grown hoarse by screaming out, ‘No reading ! No writing ! No Lancaster ! No Popery !’ for fear of coming change, am here to add what remains of my voice to the full chorus of ‘No anarchy ! No innovation !’ ”

“ I am myself,” Bentham once complacently remarked, “ the most egregious and offensive libeller men in power in this country ever saw.”

And yet, after all, the noteworthy fact about Bentham is not that he can revile. There are greater masters of invective, which in him too often loses half its force by losing all its reticence. The wonder rather is the union of scoffs, flouts, derision, vituperation, denunciation, with an unaffected love of men and a cheerful geniality that endeared this “egregious and offensive libeller” to every one who really knew him.

James Mill has told us, in his envenomed “Fragment on Mackintosh,” that Bentham’s critics regarded him as a man whose habit and practice was to hold forth in a conventicle of fools and knaves, or both, such as elsewhere was not to be found on the face of the earth. Had such been admitted to the Hermitage in Queen’s Square, they would have found a strange reversal of their apprehensions. For they would have

met there one of the gentlest of men, hospitable with the kindest hospitality, remarkable for the peculiar benevolence of his manner, fond of music and flowers, of little children and pet animals, and wholly unobtrusive of theories. No misinterpretation could be more flagrant than to ascribe Bentham's seclusion to misanthropy. The prime cause lay in his devotion to his work. "I give my mornings to nobody," he says, in his 84th year. "I have so much to do, and so short a time to live, that I cannot abridge my working hours." For Bentham's work, we must remember, did not lie in the *origination* of ideas, for which contact with the world may have its uses and afford its inspirations. It lay in a "method of detail," that is, in the working of what was, after all, but a small stock of leading ideas into their minutest and most logically divided applications. It was this that compelled him to a willing seclusion, and the prodigious labour with which his seclusion was filled.

"I have seen him," writes his intimate friend, Dumont, "suspend a work almost finished, and compose a new one, only to assure himself of the truth of a single proposition which seemed to be doubtful. A problem in finance has carried him through the whole of political economy. Some questions of procedure obliged him to interrupt his principal work till he had treated of judicial organisation. This preparatory labour, this labour in the mines, is immense. No one can form an idea of it, except by seeing the manuscripts, the catalogues, the synoptical tables, in which it is contained." * Thousands of pages that he wrote, one may add, have to this day never been published.

* See Preface to the "Theory of Legislation," Trübner & Co., 1876.

He once made the discovery that “genius” means *production*. His entire life is a comment on that text.

But there was nothing here of the moroseness that lies in wait for the recluse. It was from first to last a healthy nature and a happy life, full of a boyish cheerfulness and an imperturbable geniality. Shortly before his death, he put on paper this brief philosophy of life :—“The way to be comfortable is to make others comfortable. The way to make others comfortable is to appear to love them. The way to appear to love them is to love them in reality.” And what, perhaps, makes this goodwill to men the more attractive is that it went with no high professions of disinterestedness. He once, no doubt, declared himself, in a mood of exuberance, to be “the most philanthropic of the philanthropic.” But he never seriously flattered himself on being a philanthropist. On the contrary, among the last lines he penned in his memorandum-book was this remarkable well-known confession :—

“I am a selfish man, as selfish as any man can be. But in me somehow or other, so it happens, selfishness has taken the form of benevolence.”

This being so, it is time to ask a question. If a man tells us that he is the most philanthropic of the philanthropic in one breath, and in the next describes himself, and with truth, as the most egregious libeller that men in power have ever known ; if, through a long life, he flings missiles broadcast at his fellow-countrymen, and ends in the conviction that selfishness in him has taken the form of benevolence—is it not a contradiction ?

But there is none here. For it was not Oxford, nor the Bar, nor Whig society, nor all that he saw of sine-curists or monopolists, that made Bentham the great

critic of things established. Far less was it a corrosive mind and an embittered spirit. It was the fact that behind all his negations there was belief. Even from early student days there had been rising before his mind a comprehensive idea of the public good. He had read in Priestley, when twenty-two, of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. He had encountered the same idea, indeed the very phrase, in Beccaria ; and it had found confirmation in the pages of Hume. It met what was already in his mind. It fostered his instincts of philanthropy. It satisfied the benevolence of his aspirations. It gave unity to his thoughts, and direction to his aims. He seized upon it firmly, and finally, and the peculiar cast of his genius did the rest. By an analytic faculty that was masterly, by a grasp of detail that has never been surpassed, by an infinite patience of unresting labour, he worked the idea out, and he did not flag till he had wrought it into the very texture of theoretical law and politics.

It would be rash to say that this idea is, philosophically speaking, unassailable. This we shall see in due course. But even if "greatest happiness of the greatest number" be an imperfect formula, it served to denote for Bentham, and for many another since, a supreme positive fact, the fact, namely, that in law and politics the final court of all appeal is the public good. It was his hold upon this fact that gave their fervour to his comminations. For in the light of it, Law had gained a new dignity. It had become "the science which holds in its hand the happiness of men and nations," and forthwith against that background every legal abuse took on an added iniquity. It defrauded the client, of course, and this was bad ; but it was a

worse thing that, by consecrating injustice, it defrauded mankind. It blocked the way to the public good, and, therefore, in the name of the public good it had to go, not without maledictions.

Similarly in politics. Here, too, it is the believer not the unbeliever who is the most radical reformer. This will quickly appear if we remember what the distinctive characteristic of political reform in this country has been. It has been a movement against monopoly. There have been other watchwords, but the enduring watchword has been "no monopoly." It was a movement which already had achieved much. The Catholic monopoly had perished in the sixteenth, and the Royal monopoly in the seventeenth centuries. But when Bentham came to politics, monopolies still stood—the monopoly of Protestant against Catholic—the monopoly of Tory and Whig boroughmongers against non-electors—the monopoly of master against slave—the monopoly of corn-producer against corn-consumer—and (as some would add) the monopoly of capitalist against labourer—not to speak of what some ardent reformers would call the oldest and most inveterate monopoly of all, the monopoly of men against women.

Now it was monopoly that Bentham attacked; and we may truly say that nothing more became him than his manner of attacking it. For he did not stake his case either on reviling monopolists, or on denouncing monopolies. He could do both. But he sought also through his own message and through the message of followers like the two Mills, who, *in politics*, were greater than himself, to lodge in the minds of his countrymen an ideal of the public good, so comprehensive, so impartial, so reasonable, and so satisfying, that by its

mere presence there it might unmask every monopoly as an obstruction, and brand every monopolist as a robber of the commonwealth. It is this, and not only, as some have thought, its negations, that is the supreme service that Benthamism has rendered. Later philosophy may have conceived the public good more adequately, but no philosophy either before or since has ever kept its eye more steadfastly fixed upon that supreme object.

It is for this reason that it has always acted as a powerful incitement to political benevolence. In Bentham the founder, in James Mill the propagandist, in John Mill the apostle, it has nobly striven to expand the area of practical interests. In words of Bentham's own, "Limits it has none other than those of the habitable globe." In nothing is it more truly in the vanguard of the modern spirit. Even the Greeks, when all is said, bounded their obligations by narrow political barriers. As some one has said, they were not so much political philosophers as philosophers of the *πόλις*. And in the modern world it is only by slow degrees that the best of citizens have come to realise their duties to the slave or the savage. Even in our own day there is many a good patriot who looks askance at cosmopolitanism as a thing of vague humanitarian enthusiasm; if, indeed, he be not ready to drop, with Burke, the insinuation that lovers of their kind may be haters of their kindred. It is to this spirit that Benthamism is an antidote. It joins hands with Christianity itself in the breadth of its answer to the old question: Who is my neighbour? It goes further. For "Jeremy Bentham, the most philanthropic of the philanthropic," is not to be satisfied, even with the great human race, "in all places and at

all times." Like J. S. Mill, he does not forget the animals. "The question is not," he says, putting the matter in a way that to utilitarian hedonism is convincing, "Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?"

It goes closely with this that Benthamism carries in it a sort of gospel of political integrity. No philosophy has ever more sternly set itself against that fatal contraction of the political sympathies that comes in the insidious guise of loyalty to friends, or kindred, or connections. No philosophy, to put the matter more bluntly, ever more resolutely took its stand against nepotism, jobbery, log-rolling, favouritism and betrayal of public trust. Even as an ethical doctrine it is one of the glories of utilitarianism that it pled the claims upon private men of social duties and public responsibilities. And in doing so it was but putting on paper the spirit of Bentham's whole life. No man has ever held his powers or his wealth more as a public trust. And when, at the end, he bequeathed his body to the dissecting knife in the interest of science, he did but set the seal on a long private life of public devotion. We may judge from this what he would exact from public men in public life. And in truth he has left us in no doubt. "I would have the dearest friend I have to know that his interests, if they come in competition with the public, are as nothing to me."

And yet these practical merits of Benthamism come from the very source of certain of its theoretical difficulties. It is for the sake of the happiness of the greatest number that we are bidden to count the interests of our dearest friend as nothing. It is for the sake of the happiness of the greatest number that we are forbidden to tolerate privilege or monopoly or

class interest or “sinister interest” in any shape or form. Well and good. But now we have to ask a question:—Where is the proof that, by thus pursuing the happiness of the greatest number, we shall produce, or contribute to produce, the greatest happiness? This is a question that Benthamism must face.

On one assumption, the answer is easy. If only we might assume that all men are equal, then indeed it is simple political philosophy, because it is nothing more than simple arithmetic, to conclude that the greater the number of men made happy, the greater the resulting sum of happiness. This, however, is precisely the line of proof (if we may call it proof) which Bentham could not take. The dogma of the equality of men was just one of those “anarchic fallacies” that was abhorrent to him. And, in point of fact, he poured derision upon it with a copiousness and an animosity which no Tory could surpass, and which Burke, or Carlyle himself, might have envied.

This being so, the question that emerges is obvious. If men are not equal, why treat them as if they were? Why identify the happiness of *the majority* with the end of legislation? Why preach, on a thousand pages, equality before the law? Why attack monopoly in every shape? Why level men at the door of the polling booth? Why count each as one? Why argue, as he does, that a greater equalisation of property is a justifiable aspiration?

It must, I imagine, be already evident that this raises a problem which goes to the roots of Benthamism as a theory. Thus Sir Henry Maine, in this very reference, tells us of a certain Brahmin who had quite insuperable difficulties in accepting the happiness of the greatest number as the supreme political end, on the ground

that, according to his reckoning, the happiness of one Brahmin was worth at least the happiness of twenty ordinary men.* One wonders if he spoke in all innocence, or if he meant to convey just a shadow of suggestion that there might be, elsewhere than in India, those who live and act in the evident conviction that the happiness of one western Brahmin is at very least equal to that of a score of western pariahs. Be this as it may, our Brahmin does not stand alone. Every critic of Bentham must sympathise with him. For, once these inequalities are recognised as facts—inequalities of endless diversity from crown and sceptre to scythe and spade—where is the political arithmetic to be found which will demonstrate the Benthamite solution as against the Brahminical, or for that of it, the Brahminical as against the Benthamite? The citizens of a commonwealth may, of course, be called units; but they are units far from arithmetical. No two of them are alike. Each one of them (as Bentham well knew) has his own peculiar sensibilities to pleasures and pains. And each is unlike even his next door neighbour in gifts and opportunities, in hopes, fears, sympathies, antipathies, estimates of men and things. Who then, we may ask, will venture to stand forward and undertake to weigh the pleasures of this poor man as against the pleasures of that rich man; or the pains of this group of citizens as against the pains of that group, or (more difficult task still) the pains of this class as against the pleasures of that class? Let any one try the experiment, even within the small circle of his own acquaintance. He may then better understand the task of the legislator who has to compute,

* "Early History of Institutions," p. 399.

in terms of pleasure and pain, the effects of a projected law upon the lives of great multitudes. "Moral arithmetic," "hedonistic calculus," "sum of pleasures," and so forth, are phrases not unattractive. They suggest solutions. But one may not stifle the doubt that, when it comes to estimates of human happiness or misery, arithmetic in politics is not much more helpful than politics in arithmetic.

Benthamism, however, has more ways than one of meeting such objections. In the first place it simplifies the problem by breaking it up and thereby making it more definite. It does not leave the Benthamite legislator to work out his sums in political arithmetic from beginning to end with no more concrete end before his eyes than the vague general happiness. It specifies four subordinate ends in the light of which general happiness may be interpreted, four finger-posts, if one may call them so, which point the way to public good. These are subsistence, abundance, equality and security.* The first two need no comment. It is obvious that without subsistence happiness would disappear in destitution and death. It is almost equally obvious that there must be abundance, or as one might prefer to call it, accumulation. For it has become one of the commonplaces of economic analysis that a community that struggles along on the level of mere subsistence is precariously situated. Without savings, it will be ready to drop into the

* See "Theory of Legislation," Principles of the Civil Code, part i. c. ii. "Ends of Civil Law." "Some persons," he adds, "may be astonished to find that *Liberty* is not ranked among the principal objects of law. But a clear idea of liberty will lead us to regard it as a branch of security. Personal liberty is security against a certain kind of injuries which affect the person. . . . Political liberty is . . . security against injustice from the ministers of government."

jaws of destitution on the first industrial reverse. And even far short of this, it must signally fail to provide the resources without which labour will lose its efficiency, and capital be paralysed in enterprise. Nor does the matter rest there. For in the modern State it is not the industrial system alone that calls for "abundance:" its whole higher civilisation comes to depend not only on "the sinews of war," but—as Cobden afterwards so strenuously taught—on the sinews of peace.

Nor is it difficult to follow Bentham in the passionate emphasis he lays upon security, which to him is nothing less than "the distinctive index of civilisation." No writer could be firmer here. No one has made it clearer that without social security and the sense of security, the reasonable expectations on which men plan their lives would be at an end. Accumulation would cease. Even subsistence, he declares, would no longer be forthcoming, and society perish in want. This radical is nothing less than an apostle of security.

The difficulty comes when we turn to equality. It has been said, it was De Tocqueville's conclusion, drawn from his searching survey of the United States, that the pursuit of equality is the fundamental principle of democracy. But it is not a dictum that Bentham would adopt, and his words are unmistakable. For should the pursuit of equality come into collision with security, "it will not do to hesitate for a moment. Equality must yield." And yet, of course, equality stands as one of the four recognised subordinate ends, and the question that rises and presses for an answer is, Why? Why, if men are admittedly not equal nor ever can be, should equality be thus elevated even

to a second place? Why, if Quashee Nigger (to use Carlyle's vividly concrete antithesis) be not equal to Socrates or Shakespeare, nor Judas Iscariot to Jesus Christ, nor Bedlam and Gehenna equal to the New Jerusalem, should radicalism give to all alike, not merely equality before the law, nor yet merely equality of political rights, but press on still further to a greater equalisation of worldly means? This is the crux of Benthamism. And small wonder. For it is also the crux of modern democracy.

To this question there appear to be two answers. The one is that in its pursuit of equality Benthamism is simply following the path of practicality. When a man takes his place in public life, be it as statesman and legislator or simply as ordinary citizen, he does so in the hope that he will act, through legislation and administration, upon great masses of his countrymen. This is his honourable ambition. But, if this ambition is ever to be satisfied it will only be when, as a man of action, he has reconciled himself to two things: firstly to dismiss as Utopian the possibility of taking account of the endless inequalities of individuals; and secondly, to regard his fellow-citizens for all purposes of legislation or public action as if they were equals. For in that way alone will he be likely to reap for his country the largest crop of happiness. This is in effect the interpretation suggested by Sir Henry Maine. Puzzled by the paradox that Bentham should pursue that very equality which he denies and derides, Maine comes to the conclusion that he adopted this course as simply a working rule for legislation.*

* Maine's "History of Institutions," lect. xiii. p. 399. "Assume a numerous and tolerably homogeneous community—assume a sovereign

But there is another, and a deeper, justification of Benthamite equality than this. For when Bentham pled, and he pled with conviction, for a greater equalisation of worldly means, he certainly believed that he could prove his point. And his proof rests upon two propositions which, if they be true, are of nothing less than the first importance.*

The one is that to increase a man's means is to increase his happiness. And the second, that as we pass upward in the scale of wealth, the happiness which increased wealth undoubtedly brings does not by any means continue to increase in proportion to the increase of the wealth. On the contrary, a law of diminishing returns begins to operate at an early stage. For though an increase of ways and means will generally bring some increase of happiness to its possessor, it does not follow that the crop of happiness, any more than other crops, will go on increasing in proportion to the corresponding increments of wealth. A fresh £1000 a year may doubtless give an added joy to life even to a millionaire, but who will deny that it will stir but a feeble pulse of happiness in him in comparison with what a hundredth part of that sum would effect if it were added to the income of his clerk? It would seem to follow that the best policy, the policy, that is, which makes for greatest happiness, is that of distributing the elements of well-being widely as against the counter-policy (not unknown in politics) of concentrat-

whose commands take a legislative shape—assume great energy, actual or potential, in this legislature—the only possible, the only conceivable, principle which can guide legislation on a great scale is the greatest happiness of the greatest number."

* See Bentham's "Theory of Legislation," part i. c. vi. "Pathological propositions upon which the good of Equality is founded."

ing them in the hands of a minority, however meritorious. Bentham urges this policy more especially in regard to wealth. But the same argument applies to the distribution of civil and political rights. For these are conditions which (it may be argued) lie so manifestly on the very threshold of human happiness that the lack of them in the life of the ordinary man could not be compensated by the exceptional satisfactions, however intense, of the privileged few, however gifted. It is, at any rate, not to be denied that there is a point where even a modest increase of worldly means may make all the difference between struggling poverty and decent competency. And this is a difference of such vital import as far to outweigh in significance the difference that lies between competency and riches. It outweighs it because decent competence may carry in it not only emancipation from the miseries of want, but the opportunity for higher things, and not least for the life of active citizenship, which are of the essence of human happiness. It follows that there is no real inconsistency between Bentham's emphatic recognition of the inequality of men and his equally emphatic plea for democratic equality. On the contrary, it is to his credit that the clear perception that inequalities are stubborn and inevitable did not blind him to the fact that the steady democratic movement towards equality — equality of civil rights, of political rights, and even of wealth—is the path to greatest happiness.

None the less, the argument has its weaknesses. For it is not possible to accept the Benthamite case for equality, strong though it be, without at least one serious qualification. If, at a first glance, it may seem axiomatic to say that to increase a man's material

well-being is to increase his happiness, the axiom is one with only too many exceptions. Is not the course of industrial history strewn with instances in which material betterment has served only to disclose a lamentable inability to profit by it? Has it not even proved at times the deluding path to thriftlessness and destitution? * A similar qualification applies to political rights. We sometimes call them boons and gifts, the boons and gifts democracy has to bestow. But the gift is one thing, the capacity to use it, or even to learn to use it, is another. Nor does it need many words to prove that the bestowal of franchises upon those who, for lack of intelligence and public spirit or from defect of character, are incapable of using them is not the way to greatest happiness. This is the weak point in the Benthamite argument, and it has manifest far-reaching significance.† Nothing is easier for a victorious democracy than to give. To civil rights it can add political rights in all degrees on to universal suffrage and payment of members, and to political rights it can, if it will, add a drastic socialism designed to level up and level down existing inequalities of wealth. The crux comes in finding reasonable assurance that the recipients of the gifts will be fit to use them for the public good. It is here that Benthamism came short. It needed the closer analysis of J. S. Mill to open its eyes to the magnitude of the task of making the individual fit for all that Bentham was so eager to give.

And yet Bentham, despite his cheerful optimism, was not without misgivings of his own as to the tendencies of the equalitarian spirit. For the context in

* See Mrs. Bosanquet's "The Strength of the People," p. 79, for some striking illustrations.

† See below, p. 44.

which he so decisively subordinates equality to security discloses in this arch-radical a conservative spirit of which perhaps we have not yet suspected him. What else can we say of a writer so sympathetic with private property in land as to rejoice over the enclosure of commons by private landowners, and so tender to private capital and the expectations which it fosters as to declare that "the hostile sword in its utmost furies" is a less dreadful prospect than the victory of socialism ? *

If there be any latter-day radicals who mourn over this lapse of a philosophic brother, they must find their consolation in the fact that if Bentham thus stopped short of radicalism's furthest, he did so for the same reason that made him go so far. No one can deny that he went far—so far, indeed, that he was quite prepared (witness his handling of Paine and the "Rights of Man") to reform radicalism itself even to its foundations. And if he did not go further, we know why. Because his eye was ever on the public good, in the name of which he was as firm to resist socialism as he was eager to destroy monopoly.

And yet we must not suppose that fears of socialism ever gave pause to his democratic ardour or energies. As the years went on, it was more and more to democratic government he looked for the realisation of his hopes, even his hopes of legal reform; and it was to the elaboration, or over-elaboration, of his theories of democratic government that by far the greater part of the last twenty years of his life was

* "Theory of Legislation," Principles of the Civil Code, part i. c. xi. "Opposition between Security and Equality." In c. xii. he adds, "The only mediator between these hostile interests is time."

given. For this reason, if for no other, we must not leave him without asking what this theory was.

Macaulay may help us to put it in fewest words. "The higher and middling orders," said that self-confident reforming Whig, "are the natural representatives of the human race." With the change of a single word, the statement will exactly express the views of Bentham. For "representatives" read "plunderers." The higher and middling orders are the natural plunderers of the human race—it is no travesty to say that this was Bentham's settled conviction. It was not cynicism. Nor did he see in the fact anything specially discreditable to the higher and middling orders. He saw nothing other than human nature. For in his psychology men are by nature self-interested to the core, and never to be counted upon to stir so much as a little finger (such are his own words) * for the public, save and except in so far as it is for their own interest to do so.

Results follow. The rulers of men, being themselves no more than men, are in no case fit to be trusted with irresponsible power. It is so with monarchs. It is so with aristocracies. It is so with the representative rulers of democracy. Left to themselves, they will all gravitate in the same sinister direction. Nature is strong. Nature will work; and in the name of governing (by whatever name the government may be called) they will batten on the commonwealth.

* So in the "Deontology." But as this has sometimes been regarded as no fair transcript of Bentham's views, one might add the following from the "Constitutional Code":—"Whatsoever evil it is possible for man to do for the advancement of his own private and personal interest at the expense of the public interest—that evil sooner or later he will do, unless by some means or other, intentional or otherwise, he be prevented from doing it."

There is but one sufficient security—to see in every man in power, be it hereditary power, be it elective power, a possible robber of the public. It is to “minimise confidence” in them: to “maximise control” over them, or, as he is fond of putting it, “to make public functionaries uneasy”: in other words, to enforce to the last jot and tittle, and by every constitutional device—universal suffrage, annual parliaments, vote by ballot, and so on—responsibility to that great public, that large voting majority, whose interests are supposed to be identical with the end of government, and whose interests are safe (so Bentham thought) in no hands but their own. “If it be true, according to the homely proverb, that the eye of the master makes the ox fat, it is no less so that the eye of the public makes the statesman virtuous.” For it is thus, and only thus, that public service is to be won from the jaws of private greed.

Few doctrines have so strangely united logic and paradox. The thinker who would give every man a vote sees in every child of nature a possible plunderer of the public. It is the man in whom selfishness had taken the form of benevolence who insists that in his countrymen benevolence will take the form of selfishness. “J. Bentham, the most philanthropic of the philanthropic,” so he describes himself, but clearly he was not prepared to think his own case common!

For this “theory of government” (if we may dignify it by that title) there is a certain historical apology. Some think that it was not difficult in England, between 1816 and 1832, to minimise confidence in rulers. And, for purposes of parliamentary reform, it served a purpose to make a Tory government uneasy. But

when all is said, it is seldom that a great democratic doctrine has been more lamentably travestied.

No one is likely to deny that a democracy must call its representatives to account. It does so, for the simple and honourable reason that it is minded, for better or for worse, to manage, or to mismanage, its own affairs, and to keep power in its own hands. It would not be a real democracy if it did otherwise. Irresponsible power in a ruler and a real and active democratic citizenship are ideas which simply will not fuse. But it does not follow that the democratic elector need transform himself into a detective, and his chosen representative into a possible public plunderer, from whom the paralysing and insulting eye of suspicion is never to be lifted. There need be no distrust at all. A representative may be a saint or a sage, and a constituency may believe him to be both; it will none the less expect him to give an account of his stewardship, *from no other motive than from the just democratic desire to play its part in the business of the nation.* It is this that Bentham appears unable to see. In his theory there seems no middle point between groaning under the tyranny of irresponsible rulers, and exercising the tyranny of suspicious subjects. Ridden to death by a selfish theory of human nature—of which his own life and his ideal are a splendid contradiction—he is so ingeniously busy in devising checks upon possible plunderers of the public, that it does not seem to occur to him that he might effectually scare away its truest, most efficient, and most honourable servants.

Under our democratic dispensation—for better or for worse—the ruler must be the servant of the subject. But there are two manners of service. One is the service of the delegate, steeped in pledges, mort-

gaged in judgment, enslaved to committees and caucuses. The other is the service of the representative who, as Burke has it, being a lover of freedom, is himself determined to be free, free to serve his constituents *with his judgment*.* For the worst of all slaveries is an enslavement of the judgment; the worst of all tyrannies, the tyranny that degrades a man of sense and honour into a voulble mouthpiece of foregone conclusions. Who will deny that there are many decisions of which a great electorate, by reasons of its size, its inexperience, its want of knowledge, its want of time, its passions, is inherently incapable? Who will deny that it is one of the highest ambitions of democratic freedom to enlist, by its votes, the loyal service of vigorous and independent minds? Democracy has long learnt to hate the rulers whose subjects are slaves; it has not enough learnt to despise the slaves whose masters are subjects.

It is the fatal flaw in the Benthamite theory of government that, in its minimisation of confidence and its maximisation of control, it would hasten the coming of the ill-starred day of delegative democracy. And it is for this reason that, in the name of the public good, of which he was the prophet, we may take courage to say that one of the reforms which Bentham left unaccomplished was the radical reform of the Benthamite theory of government.

* Speech at Bristol, "Works," vol. ii. p. 130.

JOHN STUART MILL

THE UTILITARIAN OPTIMISM OF J. S. MILL

JOHN STUART MILL took perhaps the most effective means in his power of writing himself down optimist. Into a "Political Economy" deeply tinctured by the teachings of Malthus, and dominated from first to last by a recognition of the niggardliness of nature, he introduced that chapter entitled "The Stationary State," which embodies surely one of the most cheerful forecasts that ever came from philosophic pen. For does it not tell us that mankind is advancing to a social state in which, thanks to an assured and permanent supply of their material needs, they will be delivered for ever from "the trampling, crushing, elbowing and treading on each other's heels which form the existing type of social life," and thereby left free to give themselves with undivided energies to political, moral and intellectual development, to the enjoyment of nature, and to the influences of solitude, "the cradle of thoughts and aspirations." Could Ruskin himself have wished for more? Yet there the picture stands, no passing vision too good to be true, but a serious forecast which claims to be rooted in economic tendencies already at work in our midst.*

Nor is this a solitary passage. There is another in the "Utilitarianism" which reads more like a dream

* "Political Economy," bk. iv. c. vi.

of eighteenth-century perfectibility than a deliberate utterance of the nineteenth century. It must be quoted at length because it is precisely its sustained hopefulness that makes it so impressive.

"No one whose opinion deserves a moment's consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within narrow limits. Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals. Even that most intractable of enemies, disease, may be indefinitely reduced in dimensions by good physical and moral education, and proper control of noxious influences; while the progress of science holds out a promise for the future of still more direct conquests over this detestable foe. And every advance in that direction relieves us from some, not only of the chances which cut short our own lives, but, what concerns us still more, which deprive us of those in whom our happiness is wrapt up. As for vicissitudes of fortune, and other disappointments connected with worldly circumstances, these are principally the effect either of gross imprudence, of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect social institutions. All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow—though a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this world becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made—yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a

part, however small and inconspicuous, in the endeavour, will draw a noble enjoyment from the contest itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of selfish indulgence consent to be without." *

It will not be denied that this is optimism. But it is not enough to call it optimism: we must add that it is optimism which triumphed over the keenest perception of obstacles—a perception of obstacles which parts it, by a whole world, from the millennium of the visionary, or the easy worthless dreams of the "fool's paradise." These obstacles, in truth, darken for Mill all along the line.

Some men are optimists because they believe in the beneficence of nature, other men because they believe in the omnipotence of God. But Mill believes in neither. Is he discoursing upon nature, it is to tell us that nature, so far from meriting our trust, still less our encomia, is, in point of fact, guilty of every crime for which men are hanged.† Is he speculating about God, it is in effect to tell us that the belief that "God's in His heaven" is very far from a guarantee that "All's right with the world" (as Browning puts it), being indeed a belief tenable only by those who are prepared to acquit God of the manifest evil of the world by denying His omnipotence. No writer could more frankly face the conclusions of his logic. Divine goodness and divine omnipotence are declared to sunder before the force of hostile fact.‡

* "Utilitarianism," p. 21.

† His words are: "In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are nature's every day performance" ("Three Essays on Religion," p. 28).

‡ "The notion of a providential government by an omnipotent Being for the good of His creatures must be entirely dismissed" (*ibid.* p. 243).

This is only what might be expected from Mill's speculative position. In a sensationalistic theory of knowledge like his, unable at utmost speculative stretch to rise above empirical generalisations which, for aught the human mind can know, may be subverted to their foundations by larger experience, there is manifestly no room for any absolute trust, persistent in the face of ugly facts, that "Somehow good will be the final goal of ill." Mill, be it clearly understood, is not an agnostic, nor an atheist. He is not unwilling to believe that there may be a God. For have we not the argument from design, such as it is? But even so, the existence of such a God would furnish but slender security for the final triumph of goodness. For though God may be regarded as the foe of evil, He is certainly never regarded by Mill as its master.

This is the first difficulty—a difficulty rooted in Mill's fundamental philosophical principles. Not in Mill, therefore, need we expect to find that pantheistic faith that has often strengthened the poet, the prophet, the reformer, by carrying the assurance, even in the darkest hour, that the nations are struggling forward to some far-off Divine event, some end greater than they know. Mazzini's watchword, "God and the People," is not possible here. The optimism of Mill must rest, if it rest anywhere, upon his faith in man.

Yet this does but bring us face to face with a new, and a not less formidable difficulty. For it must now be said that no optimist has ever avowed so low an estimate of his fellow men as Mill. This is beyond mistaking. For it is the central paradox of Mill's social teaching that he is, on the one hand, the greatest thinker of English democracy, and on the other, the persistent censor, shall we say libeller, of all sorts and

conditions, of all ranks and classes, of his fellow countrymen. Illustration is easy. "At Yarmouth," so he writes when seventeen to his corrosive father, "dined with a leading Radical; not much better than a mere Radical." It was in this spirit he was brought up, "free," as he tells us, "from the contagion of vulgar modes of thinking." It was the same in his later life. "His whole essay on the Subjection of Women," says Fitzjames Stephen, and not without reason, "goes to prove that of the two sexes which between them constitute the human race, one has all the vices of a tyrant and the other all the vices of a slave." * English society, he declares in his Autobiography, to be unfit for the society of the man of intellect—unless indeed it should accept him "as an apostle." He is a very candid friend of the people. He calls them "the herd," sometimes "the common uncultivated herd." When he writes on democratic government, it is to diffuse a terror of the majority; and when he advocates parliamentary reform, it is to tell us that of the "few points on which the English as a people are entitled to the moral pre-eminence with which they are accustomed to compliment themselves at the expense of other nations, the one of greatest importance is that the higher classes do not lie; and the lower, though mostly habitual liars, are ashamed of lying." † When he stood as radical candidate for Westminster, this passage was raked up and read out in a public meeting with the question if he wrote it. "I did," was the answer. And, indeed, there can be no doubt at all that it embodies his deliberate convictions.

* For this and other references to Fitzjames Stephen, see "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

† "Dissertations and Discussions," vol. iii. p. 44.

Passages like these can hardly be said to savour of optimism. They seem to reek of pessimism. They would embarrass any thinker, and doubly do they embarrass one who is all for Democracy. This in two ways.

For in the first place they give a handle to the cynic. The cynic might well turn round upon the writer of these belittling estimates with the question, Why, if men be indeed as bad as this, that great democratic end, the Happiness of the Greatest Number, should seem worth so much as the scuffle of a contested election? In vain to exalt the ideal of political benevolence: the area of benevolence might well shrivel into the area of blight before this withering blast of calculated disparagement. As well build a temple of rotten bricks as rear an ideal of public good out of lives that are individually contemptible.

And, in the second place, to our cynic's retort we might add the reminder, not surely out of place, that these tyrants and slaves, these philistines in need of an apostle, these "habitual liars,"—what are they but the only available, nay, the chosen instruments through whom the democratic reformer has elected to work? The reminder, be it added, is doubly to the point here because (as we shall abundantly see) it was emphatically in men that this democratic reformer set his trust. There have been reformers who believed that good institutions may do much to atone for imperfect men. But Mill is not one of them. His trust is not in institutions, but in men. If the working classes are to have a future, it will be by the prudence of individual working men. If representative government is indeed to be the best of all forms of government, this will rest with the individual voter. If social life in

general is to attain a full, vigorous, many-sided development, again it will depend upon the free self-realisation of individual men who say the thing they think and act the thing they say. It is as we have said; Mill's faith for the future turns on his faith in men. "Yes," may we not add, and in such men! in "the herd," in "the common uncultivated herd!" This is the second difficulty.

But there is a third, and it is one before which many an optimist has gone down. This third difficulty is the economic problem, to the magnitude of which the eyes of Mill as economist could not be blind. It was, in truth, by his frank recognition of this inexorable problem that Mill decisively separated himself from the earlier Radicals. Some of them (*e.g.* the metaphysically-mad Godwin and his fanatical friend Holcroft) had, like other literary leaders of the French Revolution times, been optimists. In point of fact, the two just named did not despair of even (while still in this life) vanquishing that one great eternal monarchy—the monarchy of Death! Their optimism was confident. But, then, it was of little value. For though they hoped to abolish Death, they had somehow missed the fact that mankind had to reckon with subsistence. It was far otherwise with Mill. Economist from the days when he had his first economic lessons from his father as they walked the lanes of Surrey, he had all that familiarity with the economic obstacles to progress which the Political Economy of the nineteenth century has served to disclose, and which our socialists have done their best to popularise. Above all, he had read Malthus, and significantly he tells us that it was Malthus who first turned his thoughts to social questions. We may say he repaid the debt. For to the

last, social questions always turned his thoughts to Malthus.

The results upon him of this potent influence were far reaching and final. And they separated him both in diagnosis and remedy, not only from the radicals of the Revolution, but even from Bentham and his own father. *Their* diagnosis located the disease of the body politic in bad political institutions: *their* remedy prescribed radical political reform. In their blind enlightenment they seemed to fancy that it needed but to sweep the earth of Tories and Whigs to bring a new heaven and a new earth. Mill was not so easily satisfied. The plague spot which his eye discerned lay deeper than any political abuse, even the worst, and it was one not to be cured by all the political reforms that it had entered into the heart of Tom Paine and Bentham put together to conceive.

For economic analysis had revealed to him certain facts of the first magnitude with which all future progress was bound to reckon. One of them was what he called "the most important proposition in Political Economy," the law of Diminishing Returns from Land.* He was aware, of course, that this law could be counteracted. He knew that the improvement of the industrial arts could postpone the time at which in any given country it began to operate, and even then apply an effectual drag to its action. Yet such considerations did but furnish qualifications. They did not upset this law. They did not extinguish the tendencies, due as these were to the physical properties of the soil, for which it found the formula. Let but the struggle of man with Nature go on till it became acute. Let but Nature, or Human Nature,

* "Political Economy," bk. ii. c. xii.

bring into the world more mouths to feed, and forthwith this law would disclose itself in its true colours, shall we say its true terrors, as a statement of one of the fundamental conditions of man's life upon the planet. To Mill this is ultimate. The "niggardliness of Nature" is to him a basal fact of human existence.*

This, however, is but half the truth. Niggardly of meat, Nature is anything but niggardly of mouths. This perception came to Mill early. It never left him. He is never weary of denouncing the thoughtlessness, the improvidence, the irresponsibility that bring children into the world, heedless of how they are to be fed. Nor, with all his passion for "liberty," did he hesitate to urge the imposition of legal restrictions upon improvident marriages. It is not to be wondered at. For to the end of his days he remained convinced that all the gains of social progress would be lost if the masses of the people could not learn to meet the niggardliness of Nature by mastery of this menacing growth of population.

It is not our present object to ask if in all this he was right. There are some who think that Malthus has been refuted. There are others who believe that he has been refuted so often that there are evidently serious difficulties in refuting him. Be this as it may, the point that here concerns us is that, as Mill believed, there lay straight across the path of progress this population question. Not in political institutions, not in the capitalistic system, not in competition, not in private capital or private property—in none of these things lay the really formidable foe. Not in them,

* "The niggardliness of nature, not the injustice of society, is the cause of the penalty attached to over-population" ("Political Economy," bk. i. c. xiii.).

but in the niggardliness of Nature wedded to the im-providence of Man.

This, the supreme economic obstacle to progress, is moreover magnified for Mill by a further anticipation. He could not admit, except provisionally, the force of the consideration by which the menace of an over-crowded world is commonly met—the indefinite growth of Capital. He was of course aware that capital in all prosperous countries tends to increase. He knew, none knew better, all the causes that make for this. But behind all these causes he saw the operation of a law which vitally influenced all his forecasts, the law that “profits tend to a minimum.” In other words, despite the enormous growth of capital which was ceaselessly going on before his eyes, he foresaw the coming of a day when, by the inexorable action of economic law, profits would gradually descend to a point at which further saving would cease to be worth while. He was of course aware that here again there were counteractives, waste of capital, exportation of capital, mechanical inventions, commercial enterprise, business management. Nor was he likely to miss the obvious fact that small profits upon large capitals may long suffice to stimulate saving and enterprise. But still the day was, as he thought, always coming. Gradually, but inevitably, Capital was filling up the fields of available investment, and in so doing heralding the dawn of a day when, by sheer failure of adequate inducement to save, it would become stationary. So firmly was he convinced of this that he urged this tendency as one of the main grounds for anticipating the coming of that “stationary state” in which, as we have seen, he so confidently believed.*

* See “Political Economy,” bk. iv. cc. iv.-v.

Now Mill himself did not look forward to this consummation with any misgiving. We have seen that he looked forward to "the stationary state" with enthusiasm. It was one of his ideals. But then it was so, and it evoked those eloquent forecasts already quoted, only because he believed that stationary capital would have as its accompaniment stationary population. Here comes the misgiving. For were the first of these results to come to pass and not the second; were capital to find its limits while population still went on increasing, what then? Would there be no risk that, instead of the "stationary state" with all its glowing adjuncts, society would find itself moving steadily to poverty and famine? This, it is true, may seem a vain alarm. Capital, one might suggest, could never under the conditions of "the stationary state" be stationary. The growth of intelligence, of science, of invention, which Mill hoped and believed would never be stationary, would not fail to find new sources of investment. So far "the stationary state" would prove, economically, a fiction. This, however, is not Mill's view. He believed in the tendency of economic progress to bring the stationary state of capital, just as he believed in the law of diminishing returns from land. Hence the intensified acuteness of the population question. For while niggard Nature stands sponsor for the one law, and the economic system for the other, who will be bold enough to predict that human nature will play its part in controlling what a writer of repute has called "the devastating torrent of children."*

And yet all these difficulties put together seem never to have daunted Mill. Distrustful of God,

* Cotter Morison.

censorious of men, open-eyed to the dangers that beset democracy and to the economic obstacles to progress, he never seriously doubted the advent of a bright future for mankind as for his country. Carlyle once called him "mystic." "Here," said that great prophet, as he laid down an early article of Mill's, "here is a new mystic." Strange title surely for this man who set such store upon clear ideas! Yet, in a sense, the epithet is not misplaced. For it was not upon the England of his own day that Mill's eyes were fixed and his hopes fed. It was upon a far-off future, upon a changed and a better world, in the sure coming of which he believed in the face of every difficulty with a buoyant faith such as many a visionary might envy.

This being so, it is time to ask from what sources this faith in the future drew its strength and vitality.

The first step to an answer is found in Mill's general attitude as a political thinker; and for this the only adequate word is Radicalism. For though one may not say that "The Condition of England Question" tortured Mill as it did Charles Kingsley, or that it awakened in him the *saeva indignatio* of Carlyle or Ruskin, he was none the less deeply dissatisfied with the status quo, and profoundly convinced that something radical had to be done. Proof abounds. For Mill, we must remember, was nurtured by reformers to be a reformer. This was the "educational experiment," which on the testimony of Miss Fox, Bentham and the elder Mill "tried upon John." These two set themselves to train him almost from his cradle to carry on the radical tradition, and he himself welcomed the mission with enthusiasm. We have his own record that, in his fifteenth year, he embraced Benthamism as

a religion.* Nor did he ever flag in the cause of reform. He openly avowed his sympathy with "uncontented characters." "I want to excite your passions," he said, comparatively late in life, at a Land Reform meeting. "The passion of the many is needed to conquer the self-interest of the few," so runs another avowal. He was, beyond all rivalry, the literary leader of the radicalism of his day. And when he had enriched the literature of political and social reform by his writings, he entered Parliament, and worked there for the cause as radical Member for Westminster. And though, as the years went on, he broke with Benthamism he never broke, nor wished to break with radicalism. Yet his radicalism had its peculiarities. Like Benthamite radicalism, it was "philosophical," it rested on ideas; but unlike Benthamite radicalism, one of the ideas it rested on was a belief in social continuity. For, of course, historic continuity had been no concern of Bentham. With his utilitarian hatchet Bentham had cut History in two—into the ages before Benthamism, which sat in darkness, and the ages after Benthamism, which were to see a great light. Mill knew better. He had read Comte, he had perused Michelet and the French historians. Above all he had made a study of Coleridge and interchanged ideas with the Coleridgeans, Maurice and Sterling. His openness of mind, his readiness to learn from other minds, did the rest. He made the discovery, to put the point in pregnant words of his own drawn from Coleridge, that "revolutions are sudden to the unthinking only." It was a pestilent heresy—in the eyes of the orthodox Benthamites. Nor, from commendable consideration for men to whom he owed

* "Autobiography," p. 67. "I now had opinions; a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion."

much, did he venture to avow it in the great essay on Coleridge, till Bentham and his father had passed away. But it marks his repudiation of those "new beginnings" which, in ignorant disregard of the past, are only too apt to issue in reactionary endings.

We might call this conservatism. And doubtless we may find in it one reason why Mill had little in him of the revolutionist. Even his extremest suggestion, the appropriation by the State of "the unearned increment" was far removed from confiscation. Yet conservatism would be a misnomer here. For the real significance of this wider outlook is, not that it shook his radicalism, but that it helped, more perhaps than any other single influence, to give it its decisively and even passionately individualistic character. For as Mill read history, it told him that the old dispensation of Status, under which the situation of man is the arbiter of his duties had gone not to come again, and that the new dispensation in which, by dint of his own free choice and self-assertion, man becomes the arbiter of his situation, had come. There was a time for the morality of submission and obedience, a time also for the morality of chivalry and protection of the weak by the strong. But these days, as he tells us, in certain pregnant pages of "*The Subjection of Women*," had passed, or were passing. History itself had turned that earlier page. And what remained was that every man, and every woman, free, enlightened, self-protective, self-assertive, should hold their own fate and fortunes in their own hands.*

Mill's position here is singularly interesting. It has often been remarked that though he lived on till

* "*Subjection of Women*," especially pp. 30-34.

Darwinism was in the air, he yet held himself surprisingly aloof from the application of evolutionary ideas to politics. He was shy of using, in this connection, the biological categories, "organism," "adaptation," "differentiation," "integration," with which Spencer has made the reading world familiar. It is, indeed, the very point upon which Spencer claims characteristically to be superior to him. Yet Mill was not blind to the facts. He had learnt to do justice to history; he had accepted the idea of historic continuity. Witness the essay on Coleridge. "No one," he there writes (and it would be easy to prop the weighty words by others to the same effect), "can calculate what struggles, which the cause of improvement has yet to undergo, might have been spared if the philosophers of the eighteenth century had done anything like justice to the past."

Nor is it enough to see in passages like this merely the usual lesson that radicalism must temper its reforms by reckoning with the force of circumstances. For they carry in them the further claim, so explicitly expressed in the pages of "The Subjection of Women," that the whole current of historical development makes steadily for that dispensation of individual free choice and government by consent which, from the days of Vane and the men of the Commonwealth, had been the radical tradition. This does not mean, of course, that it was in history that Mill found the final *justification* of this central principle in his creed. To the last, he was a utilitarian, and the eye of the utilitarian is primarily on the future, not on the past, on ends and not on origins. And therefore when, in the "Liberty," he comes to state the case for his individualism, his central point is to prove that individuality

is of the essence of social well-being. But it would be an injustice to the breadth and sanity of his creed to fail to recognise that he was not minded to leave the appeal to history to be the monopoly of conservatives, nor slow to claim, as neither Paine nor Bentham so much as cared to claim, that history was on the side of radicalism. For the individualistic radicalism of Mill was neither an arrogant dogma like the exploded radicalism of "Natural Rights," nor was it a narrow and bald utilitarianism like that of Bentham. It was a creed fed on a wider outlook, and for that very reason held with a deeper conviction as the years went on. But it is gratuitous to multiply evidence here. The great essay on Coleridge, a landmark in Mill's mental growth, is alone sufficient proof that its writer is to be classed not with the radicals of revolution who flouted history, but with the radicals of evolution who respect and even write history.

It is, however, just here that the most formidable of his critics both in economics and politics have met him. With a true instinct they have assailed what has seemed to them this fanatical faith in the free choice of individuals. For there are persons they say—and who can deny it?—who are not capable of free choice that is of the slightest value. Children are not, nor savages. And if not these, what then, as Fitzjames Stephen bluntly puts it, of "the ordinary peasant" or "the petty shopkeeper?" * The question, it is true, is not respectful to the peasant and the

* "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," p. 28. "What is there in the character of a very commonplace ignorant peasant or petty shopkeeper in these days which makes him a less fit subject for coercion on Mr. Mill's principle than the Hindoo nobles and princes who were coerced by Akbar?"

shopkeeper. But is it more disrespectful than certain remarks (we need not again repeat them) which had fallen from Mill himself? And now, it would seem, these harsh judgments have come home to roost.

It cannot be denied that Mill has invited this assault. No writer has ever had more confident hopes of what liberty, *i.e.*, individual free choice, can do for men: no writer stirs deeper doubts as to whether men are fit for liberty. No writer urges more eloquently that all will be well if men are left to do as they please: none awakens more lively misgivings as to what it may please them to do. We think of men as they are to be, and the heavens open. We recall what they are, and darkness descends.

This brings us to the problem which every student of Mill must do his best to solve. Mill's optimism is unwavering: his individualism is final: but how, if individuals be as he paints them, can individualism justify optimism?

The answer is not easy. But at least the clouds begin to lift when we turn to his political psychology, and briefly compare his analysis of political motive with that of Bentham and James Mill.

These two men, so diverse in temperament, so alike in creed, had confided to Mill the ark of utilitarianism and radicalism. They had planted in his mind, beyond dislodgment, the "religion" that the supreme political end is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But to this gospel of political benevolence there was another and a less glowing side. For however benevolent Bentham and the elder Mill had been in the end they set before mankind, and (be it added) in the apostolic pertinacity with which they worked for it, neither of them ever expected of mankind that sacrifice

which they themselves practised. Their words are here beyond mistaking. By those two powerful minds the ideal of a Greatest Happiness, sufficient to stagger imagination in its comprehensiveness, was tied to a doctrine of the inherent selfishness of the instruments, the men and women, by whom alone under a democratic dispensation it could be realised. There is no more glaring paradox in political literature. As we read of the end, it is altruism triumphant. The scene changes, and we find Bentham's declaration that men will not so much as lift a little finger for their neighbours save and so far as it makes for their own interest, and James Mill's rasping laugh at the "simpletons" who reckon upon unselfish motives. It follows that the ultimate expectations of both cannot travel beyond the hope that, by operating upon selfish human nature by the external sanctions more especially of law, public opinion, and religion, public service may be won from private selfishness.*

It is not within our scope to enter upon an examination of this psychology. Our concern must be narrowly limited to two points. The one is that it plants athwart the path of human progress a fatal barrier. Evil day for the service of the public, ill omen for human progress, if public spirit to become practical must shrivel to self-interest! The second point is that this is precisely the conclusion to which J. S. Mill, in defiance of the masterful influences of his teachers, was led. For it was one of the greatest efforts in his life to free the Benthamite philosophy of reform from the Benthamite theory of motive. Upon this there can be no manner of doubt. For though

* See above, pp. 32-33.

the elder Mill laboured, perhaps more strenuously than ever father has laboured with son, to make the younger Mill an orthodox Benthamite, it is to his credit that, however undesignedly, he made him more. With his Benthamism the son developed another thing—that power of learning from other minds which was the one possession in which, with the modesty of greatness, he claimed to be superior to other men. The inevitable result followed. His mind burst the narrow limits of sectarian Benthamism. Receptive where his teachers were impervious, he listened to other voices—to the apologists of Christian ethics like Maurice and Sterling, to the advocates of “the religion of humanity,” even to the gospel of sacrifice as this stands written in “*Sartor Resartus*;” with the result that he came to read life and experience so differently from his masters in Benthamism as to declare that human nature has it in it to pursue the public good even, if need be, at total sacrifice of personal happiness.

This stands written in the “Utilitarianism.” For though that well-known *apologia* has not convinced the world, it has defined the position of the apologist. Grant that he equally fails to reconcile “psychological hedonism” and utilitarian altruism, grant that he may even be said to fail grotesquely in bridging the great gulf between the psychological asseveration that all human desire is, as matter-of-fact, desire for pleasure, and the ethical demand that every individual is bound to pursue the happiness of mankind, we may still carry from the pages of this perplexing treatise at least two affirmations of decisive significance. One is the statement uncompromisingly explicit that, as the world is at

present constituted, the individual must be prepared to face the complete sacrifice of his own pleasures,* the other, writ large in the lengthy chapter on the sanctions of the utilitarian principle, is the contention that human nature is capable of developing a social feeling, so deeply seated ("a subjective feeling in one's own mind," he calls it with tautological emphasis) and so inseparably interwoven with social ideas, that it resists the dissolving power of all analysis and can be broken through only on penalty of remorse.† Nor does Mill leave us in any doubt that, in comparison with this internal, and indeed ineradicable feeling of obligation, the "external sanctions," so prominent in Benthamism, are superficial and ineffective. What thus appears in the philosophical treatise comes to light in still more memorable words spoken to Miss Fox at a time when a private sorrow had evoked his inmost thoughts. "No one," he then said, "should attempt anything to benefit his age without at first making a stern resolution to take up his cross and bear it."

Mill seems to have come to this conviction, partly at any rate, through what he calls the "mental crisis" of his life—one of the most suggestive chapters in the range of autobiography. He tells us there that a time came in his life (it was at the end of his twentieth year) when he put to himself the question whether if the end, the public good, for which he had hitherto been working, were forthwith realised, the result would

* "Utilitarianism," p 23. "Though it is only in a very imperfect state of the world's arrangements that any one can best serve the happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own, yet so long as the world is in that imperfect state, I fully acknowledge that the readiness to make such a sacrifice is the highest virtue that can be found in man."

† *Ibid.* pp. 41-51.

bring him personal happiness, and he adds that the answer he could not suppress was, No. Hitherto he had been labouring for the happiness of mankind with an industry, a cheerfulness, an optimism that was the envy and admiration of all who knew him. He had even been "accustomed to felicitate himself on the certainty of a happy lot which he enjoyed through placing his happiness in something durable and distant." But somehow this shadow fell, and the thought of the public happiness lost its charm. It had not vanished. It had not even changed. It stood there, the same supreme object it had ever been, as clear as ever, perhaps clearer, before the mental eye. But it was no longer happiness to think of it, nor any happiness to pursue it.*

The effects of this experience (in alliance doubtless with other influences) were permanent. One was the conviction, the so-called "paradox of hedonism," that to aim at personal happiness is not the way to attain it; and the other a repudiation of the legacy of Benthamism that mankind are not to be moved to public service save by touching them in their selfish interests. Not that he ever underrated the motive of self-interest. He was still only too much his father's son to underrate the selfishness of men as they are. Just as little does he deny the value of the external sanctions. Always in his estimates of institutions justice enough is done to the value of the appeal they make to self-interest. He remarks explicitly upon "the folly of premature attempts to dispense with the inducements of private interest in social affairs." Nor is it to be forgotten that even when he is arguing for

* "Autobiography," c. v.

the depth and strength of his social sanction, he hastens to affirm that it is not to be supposed that it is more than a minority in whom it is to be found.* Yet even when every qualification is made, the step he took here was decisive. It cut the philosophy of reform loose from a theory of motive almost cynical in its selfishness. It carried the assertion that human nature is at any rate capable even of "the cross."

Need it be said that this is a vital point? It is ever a hard task to prove to the individual reformer that he will personally profit by public service. It is hard even when the ends in view are near and certain; it is impossible when these ends, say the waging of a war, the annexation of a dependency, the reform of a landed system, the organisation of education, are inevitably distant and precarious of achievement. In all such cases the small fraction of personal pleasure that is expected to accrue to the individual reformer, even when it is added to the larger fraction of pleasure which the hope of such reforms may already stir in the reformer's breast—these, though they are items not to be despised, are not enough to move the will to resolute and unselfish action. Who is there who does not know how easy it is in the ordinary walks of life to let the mad world go its way? Who is there who has had experience of public work who does not know the sacrifices of time, care, money, counter-attractions, which even the lesser social causes inexorably exact? It is not that sacrifices need be in contradiction to the pursuit of personal good. There is a sense in which the sacrifice of life itself may be accepted as the greatest personal good for the person who makes it.

* "Utilitarianism," p. 50.

But that is not the question here in issue. The Benthamite doctrine is that the personal good that moves the will is ultimately personal pleasure. This is its fatal weakness. It is untenable as a result of psychological analysis. And it is doubly untenable when it is offered as part of a philosophy for reformers, who might well despair if the appeal to live and strive for public good is to be limited to the coincidences—so hard to prove—of sacrificing service and personal pleasurable satisfaction. Hence the magnitude of the debt of philosophical radicalism to Mill. He saw, as Mazzini and Carlyle saw with still clearer eyes, that as the world is constituted, the hedonism of his teachers was impotent to justify and still more to evoke sacrifice; and in that conviction he laboured to deliver utilitarianism from the reproach that, as expounded by Bentham and James Mill, it fastened upon the cause of reform the forlorn task of preaching an end nothing if not unselfish to a world constitutionally incapable of one genuine unselfish motive.

This is, however, no more than a first step. Even granting that human nature is capable of "the cross," it remains to establish the probability that human nature will soar to this altitude, especially in view of the fact that (as we have abundantly seen) upon Mill's own showing, mankind as they are seem by no means minded to do so. Where are the influences to work the miracle—the miracle of transforming the rank and file of Mill's denunciations into the public spirited democracy of his aspirations?

Speaking broadly, it may be said that Mill's hopes for democracy lie along four lines. These are legislation, voluntary association, education, and individual

vigour and self-assertion. The main stress will be found to lie on the two last.

As regards legislation, Mill is too often popularly classified as an apostle of what Huxley called "administrative nihilism," and Carlyle the "liberty of leaping over precipices," in other words, of *laissez-faire* in its extremist form. This is a mistake. It was but half of the plan of the memorable essay "On Liberty" to point out when, and why, society and government ought not to intervene: the other part of the plan, as Mill himself told George Grote (whose orthodoxy was greatly alarmed thereby) was to point out where it ought to, but did not, intervene. And the latter part of this plan is so far from subordinate as to involve legal restraints on some of the most private affairs in life. Mill is for compulsory education, for legal prohibition of improvident marriages, and for legal restraint upon the "domestic tyrants" who would condemn their children to premature labour in the name of freedom of contract. Nor is this advocate of liberty at all averse to see the finger of the State in public works, colonisation, charity, hours of labour, endowment of research.* It was not without reason therefore that he gave so much of his thought to the problem of the best form of government. For government had, upon his theory of its functions, not a little to do. It is here that Mill's divergence from the Manchester School is quite pronounced. For in the attitude of Bright and Cobden to popular government there is always a peculiar reservation. They are prepared, of course, like the staunch radicals they were, to set the people in power, but they are not minded to allow the people to be

* See "Political Economy," bk. v. c. xi. especially §§ 8-16.

over-active in its exercise. They present the democracy with a weapon beyond all price, but the weapon is to be on no account produced too often. They are eloquent over a wide franchise, and equally eloquent in preaching the minimisation of the government that is to rest upon it. Far otherwise with Mill. Representative government was, in his eyes, a real and effective instrument of progress.

And yet Mill's faith in government had limits of decisive and far-reaching application. (a) One limit lay deeply rooted in an all but aristocratic distrust of majorities. No one has written down the majority—not even Herbert Spencer or Sir Henry Maine—more strenuously than he. He places it, of course, in power. A democrat could not do otherwise. But no sooner has he done it than catching up the note of alarm from De Tocqueville, whose "*Democracy in America*" profoundly influenced his thought, he diffuses a terror of majorities, and takes every security that ingenuity can devise against the multiplied tyranny of the multitude—a tyranny, as he reminds us, more terrible far than individual despotism, as leaving no loophole of escape to its victims.* Like the earlier radicals he hated the despotism of kings and aristocracies. But he went beyond them in dreading the despotism of *any power*, even though it was the power of the people. Hence his defence of government by majority resolves itself into the argument that an unresisted majority is incapable of governing. Hence his plea for an organised opposition under all forms of government. Hence in

* "The silent sympathy of the majority may support on the scaffold the martyr of one man's tyranny ; but if we would imagine the situation of a victim of the majority itself, we must look to the annals of religious persecution for a parallel." ("Dissertations" vol. ii. p. 39.)

parliamentary reform the “greater weight” he would give the educated voter. Hence his almost fanatical plea for the representation of minorities. Hence his eagerness to welcome suggestions—the elaborate scheme of Hare for example—which might shape the representative system so as to counteract the influence of “collective mediocrity.” Previous radicals had a deep distrust of rulers. This radical has a deep distrust of voters. As a radical he was of course bound to believe that somehow the rule of the majority would make for Order and Progress, but he is manifestly convinced that a prime condition of this is that the majority must be withheld to the face. His attitude here is characteristically summed up in that singular avowal of his intended policy as member of Parliament, “to expend all the popularity he got from his books in upholding unpopular opinions !” So firm was his belief that the way to serve the State was to beard the crowd.

(b) This was one limit to his faith in Legislation.

The other lay in his doctrine of the inviolability of the individual. Round every individual life he would have us draw a charmed circle not to be infringed, within which each citizen was to do as he pleased without let or hindrance either from law or social pressure. All encroachment upon this was his abhorrence; and he tried to justify himself by his well-known distinction between acts that affect our neighbours, when law may justifiably intervene to protect them, and “self-regarding acts,” when law is to be met in all cases by an uncompromising “Hands off.”* The distinction is untenable (as we shall see), but it at any rate satisfied its author. To the last he remained convinced that there

* “On Liberty,” c. iv.

is a large tract of life, the region of “self-regarding acts,” with which neither law nor administration nor public opinion have anything to do—unless to guard it jealously from invasion.

From these two limits upon Legislation the inference is obvious. He who believes in the fallibility, not to say the folly, of majorities, and the inviolability of “self-regarding acts,” is not likely, under a democratic dispensation, to look for social salvation to government. And indeed this comes out clearly in Mill’s attitude to Socialism. He was far from unsympathetic here. He had emancipated himself from cut-and-dried economic dogmas. He did not believe that the laws of Distribution were laws of Nature: he believed that they were pre-eminently alterable. He wished to alter them. Still less did he soothe himself—like Bastiat—with the false flattering unction that the economic organism was a self-acting harmony. On the contrary, he made the sorrowful admission that it is doubtful if all our boasted mechanical inventions have lightened the day’s toil of a single human being. He was always convinced that something radical had to be done. He even recalls a time when he and his wife were not averse to be classed as socialists.*

Yet he never really moved from his persistent individualism. All the modifications of the existing system for which he fought, would still leave it standing strongly built upon private property, private capital, inheritance, contract, and competition. Never even in his most socialistic hour, did he forget that, as the maladies of society were not ultimately due to human institutions, so it was not by even a subversion

* “Autobiography,” p. 231.

{ of human institutions, whether political or economic, that these maladies could be cured. The dangers of poverty and misery remained on his analysis ultimately traceable, as we have seen, to the niggardliness of nature and the improvidence of man. Even if socialistic legislation abolished private capital, this social revolution would, he feared, end only in disillusionment. It might "burst up" the existing form of society; but it would not remedy the evils which, as he thought, were wrongly ascribed to Competition. His words, in the "Political Economy," are explicit. "No one can foresee the time when it (*i.e.*, competition), will not be indispensable to progress." Or, again: "They (*i.e.*, those who charge upon competition the evils of existing society) forget that wherever competition is not, monopoly is, and that monopoly in all its forms is the taxation of the industrious for the support of indolence if not of plunder."*

It was these convictions that turned his sympathies so strongly to voluntary Co-operation. For Mill's individualism is not atomistic or "anarchic." So long as collective action be voluntary, few are ready to go further in support either of Co-operation or of Trades-Unionism.

How far the hopeful eagerness with which Mill welcomed these two great movements, especially Co-operation, has been justified by results, it is beyond our limits to enquire. This must be left to those who can read the signs of the times. Our present concern is to note that we find here in a fresh form the problem which for ever returns upon Mill. These

* "Political Economy," ii. bk. iv. s. 7. The draft of an essay on Socialism, published after his death, shows how keenly alive he was to the difficulties of the question.

same unsparing estimates of "the herd," which bred distrust of popular majorities in politics have to be reckoned with here also. Is there reason to think that the rank and file of the working class will be equal to the difficult task of reorganising the national industries to any considerable extent upon Co-operative lines? Can they command the requisite capital, can they be trusted to choose the true "masters in industry," to encourage enterprise, to provide for saving, and above all to impose those restraints upon the improvident increase of their own numbers without which Co-operation is, in Mill's view, as impotent permanently to improve the lot of the labourer as are Socialism or Capitalism?

To this momentous question, however, Mill's answer is an emphatic Yes. But this affirmation is confident *only upon one condition*—the paramount condition that the citizen be educated.

It is here we reach the pith of the whole matter. Convinced that a great gulf parted men as they are from men as they might become, convinced that in the dispensation of the future the individual, both in politics and in industry, must carry his own fate in his own hands, it was to education that Mill turned to bridge this gulf, and to equip the citizen and the workman for his vocation. "Given education and just laws"—this is his postulate. "This, indeed," he says elsewhere, "is not the principal but the sole remedy, if understood in its proper sense."* Utilitarianism had always reared believers in education: it produced none more confident than Mill.

It is, in truth, difficult to rise to the full height of

* "Dissertations," ii. p. 200. *Essay on "The Claims of Labour."*

Mill's optimism here. For however well-grounded the hopes which democratic reformers repose in education, the miracles of education are gradual. It is inevitable that more than one generation must pass before its results can genuinely leaven the national mind and will. Political power, on the other hand, can be given swiftly. A single parliament may suffice. The point that emerges is obvious. Where is the security that the democracy may not ignorantly and disastrously blunder in the fateful interval whilst democratic education is still an imperfectly realised aspiration and democratic power an accomplished fact? Nor is this the sole misgiving that must haunt the reader of Mill. For even if education had gone deep and far in the democracy, is there reason to think that it would bring with it those provident restraints upon population and that resolute adherence to a standard of living which, on Mill's analysis, are more vital far to the future of the body politic than even the wisest use of democratic legislation, or the success of voluntary organisation?

It is doubtful if there is anything in Mill adequately to reassure us here. He has himself to blame. Neither the individual citizen, nor majorities can be said ever to recover from the stabs dealt to them by this foe of their own household.

Yet there are considerations which, in justice to Mill's inherent reasonableness, it is but fair to bear in mind. One is that, so far as the political problem is concerned, he takes securities (weight to the educated voter, representation of minorities, and such like) against abuse of democratic power. The other—and far the more important—is that the education from which he hopes so much is to be "understood in

the widest sense." It is not bounded by the three R's, or smatterings in science, or lessons in history and political economy, or that instruction about political and social duties which some would in these days add to the curriculum. It is, besides, an education *in and through the exercise of social duties*, that sort of training, in short, which comes of experience of workshop, of trades-union, of co-operative association, of political committee, in a word, of participation in practical life.*

This is a vital point. Schooling, even when it includes not only instruction about duties but the more important incitement to perform duties which comes of example backed up by emotional and religious appeal—these are but preliminaries in the education of the citizen. They do but prepare the way for that growth in the capacity to perform civic duties which comes of having civic duties to perform. Nor can any teaching *about* duties, however excellent, suffice. For if it be paradox, it is also truth that no citizen can be proved fully fit for the gift of self-government, either in politics or industry, at the time when he first receives it. This for the simple reason that it is by actually using the gift that he makes himself practically fit for receiving it. Self-government can never be fully justified by its advocates before it is given: it can only be justified convincingly by the behaviour of its recipients after they have received it. There is risk here, of course. Democracy, still raw to its work, whether in politics or industry, may blunder. It may blunder fatally. And believers in democracy must face this fact. But, *per contra*, without running some

* See "Dissertations," ii. p. 25. "The main branch of the education of human beings is their habitual employment," &c. There are many passages to the same effect.

risk of this kind, the education of the citizen, his education in political habit, sentiment, responsibility, and judgment will never be so much as possible.

This must be borne in mind in judging Mill. His countrymen, as he paints them, may seem but poorly fitted either for political or industrial power. But it is just by the exercise of political power, and by self-government in industry, that he believes they will be made capable of better things. Even the menace of over-population loses its terrors for him in face of this large view of education. For he did not doubt that with this kind of education would come a heightened standard of comfort, and with a standard of comfort that fear of losing decencies in which economists have found the real "preventive check." It may be that he was over sanguine here. He perhaps underrated the strength of the instincts and passions that people the world, and by consequence overrated the comparative influence of ideas; "it is what men think that determines how they act," so runs his own avowal. None the less, it is not to ideas alone that he trusts in this connection, but always to ideas in alliance with the discipline of life and experience.

Nor must we forget that, with all his enthusiasm for education, Mill never staked his faith in democracy on the coming of a day when the initiative in betterment was to come from the rank and file. Let there be no mistake here. This apostle of democracy was, in certain aspects, one of the most aristocratic writers of his generation. "The initiation of all wise and noble things," so runs his deliberate conclusion, "comes, and must come, from individuals, generally at first from some one individual. The honour and glory of the average man is that he is capable of following that

initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with his eyes open."*

The sentences are startling and sweeping, and if we read them apart from the general context of doctrine, we might fancy we had somehow strayed from the gospel of democratic radicalism into the pages of anti-democratic "hero worship." They remain, in any case, a proof that Mill knew how to value leadership. But Mill is not Carlyle. We must press those significant concluding words "with his eyes open," and remember that in the last resort it was not to the Heaven-sent hero that Mill looked for social salvation, but to the vigorous self-assertion of the individual man.

This is the theme of the essay "On Liberty" which Mill thought was of all his writings the one most likely to be read in the years to come. It would be needed, he thought, to stem the despotism, legislative and other, of collective mediocrity. But this memorable essay would receive scant justice if read only as a protest against a meddlesome social despotism. It is far more. Like the "Areopagitica," by the side of which Mr. John Morley justly places it, it is a trumpet call to thought, speech and action, a passionate, positive incitement to self-assertion and self-realisation. This is the greater thing. Even were *laissez-faire* controversies forgotten, the essay would remain one of the books to which readers would return as men return to the springs of mental and moral life. It is, in truth, just for this reason that it is so well fitted to serve the more limited and negative purpose. Needful as direct arguments against paternal government may be,

* "On Liberty," c. iii. The whole context is a vehement plea for the "highly gifted and instructed One or Few."

especially in days when so many dread a coming socialism, it is not necessarily the militant controversialist who does most for the cause. Rather is it the writer who can fire his fellow-countrymen to fill their lives with thoughts, words, and deeds. Inherent strength of individual life is, after all, a better security than skill of argument against a possible tyranny either of law or of public opinion. And it is this that in the pages of the "Liberty" Mill knows how to inspire. Convinced that strong and progressive individuality is of the essence of all high civilisation, he catches up from Von Humboldt the phrase "individual vigour and manifold diversity," and sketches an inspiring picture of a society vigorous in thought, eager in discussion, strenuous in action, rich in varied modes of life, fertile even to eccentricity in "experiments in living," and peopled by citizens in whose energetic characters is reflected the many-coloured diversity of their many-coloured environment. It is this—this enriched and positive individualism, not merely the limited individualism of "Hands off"—of which Mill is distinctively the prophet. And be its flaws and fallacies what they may—and we shall see that it has some—these cannot destroy its substantial and permanent value as a democratic ideal. There is no true citizen of a great and powerful State but must long that his country should be in some sense a microcosm of civilisation. He cannot rest content, be the arguments for international specialisation what they may, that his country should be no more than the workshop or emporium, or studio, or school of science of the world. His legitimate aspiration, grounded firmly on the idea of nationality, is that it should gather within its borders a many-sided life in which all the great

permanent ends that make life worth living should find their place. Just as little can he rest content that his country's religion, literature, science, politics, family life, wealth, should be severally the peculiar monopolies of groups or classes or castes. He must wish and strive, so far as the iron law of division of labour admits, that both he and his fellow-citizens should come into vitalising and uplifting contact with all these large interests and ends which his country embraces in its larger life. This and nothing less is the aspiration of modern democracy, the democracy, as we shall see, of Mazzini and Green. For democracy is not content that society should be diverse, and the individual members of society vigorous. It insists that individual vigour must assert itself, and find its nutriment, in and through the manifold interests, religious as well as intellectual, political as well as industrial and commercial, which it is the glory of a democratic State to offer to even the humblest of its citizens. And it is because there is so much in the essay "On Liberty" to feed and foster this ideal that it will remain one of the great books of modern democracy.

It is time, however, to add that it is the very fervour with which Mill urges this passionate individualism that has laid him open to his critics.

We see this if we turn to the chapter upon liberty of Discussion. For that well-known chapter is not merely a plea for liberty to discuss, it is a vehement incentive to leave nothing undiscussed. Coupling Thought and Discussion so closely as to make them all but one and indivisible, it makes scant allowance for the fact (and who will dispute it?) that whereas excess in thinking is an extreme to which few indeed seem prone to run, there are unhappily not few but

many to whom excess in discussion is irresistible. One recalls a passage in Mr. Morley's "Rousseau," in which, in a vivid picture of fashionable France in the eighteenth century, he tells us how, in these vivacious circles "the highest things were brought down to the level of the cheapest discourse," and reminds us, in the context, how Boswell used to ask questions which Johnson declared were enough to make a man hang himself. Mr. Morley is not of course to be taken as suggesting that the highest subjects are not to be discussed. Ill would it fare with philosophy and science, with theology and ethics, and, not least, with politics, if it were so. Discussion is the recognised instrument for gaining and testing, and clarifying convictions. As the Greeks put it, dialectic is the path to definition. But it may none the less be suggested that there are seasons and circumstances when some things are better left undiscussed, and that God, virtue, and the soul are not (again to return to Mr. Morley's words) to be made "everyday topics for all comers."*

There are, moreover, questions of casuistry, and not least, of political casuistry. These must needs come in the course of experience, and when they do they must of course be met and dealt with. It does not however follow that they are to be lightly raised or cried upon the housetops. For a practice of casuistical discussion habituates the mind to the idea of the violation of the laws of life. Its tendency is, as Burke puts it, "to turn our duties into doubts." At very least, it gives the casuistical case a prominence which clothes it in a kind of generality to which, as in its

* Morley's "Rousseau," p. 130.

essence an exceptional thing, it is not entitled. Tyrannicide, to cite one of Mill's illustrations, is an interesting topic. The historian and the moral philosopher must needs discuss it. So must the ordinary citizen when some political assassination has startled the world. But, like many another act involving grave departure from ordinary obligation, it cannot be constantly discussed without "making the condition of the body politic dangerously valetudinarian."* In the essay on Coleridge Mill himself asserted that it is a prime condition of political stability that there should remain some principles that are not to be discussed and called in question.† Those who can may be left to reconcile it with the words, and still more with the spirit, of the chapter on liberty of Discussion.

Nor is it easy to admit that discussion plays so overwhelming a part as Mill claims for it in vitalising convictions, and in saving mankind from the justly dreaded "deep slumber of a decided opinion." It is, at least, a reasonable contention that convictions are vitalised even more by the moving and critical and memorable experiences of life—experiences such as Mill himself underwent in his "mental crisis"—than by the keenest dialectic and most untiring controversy. Who can doubt that there is room in life, though there is little room in the "Liberty," for a type far

* This is Burke's case against political casuistry in the "Reflections on the Revolution."

† "Dissertations," vol. i. p. 417. "In all political societies which have had a durable existence, there has been some fixed point; something which men agreed in holding sacred; which, wherever freedom of discussion was a recognised principle, it was of course lawful to contest in theory, but which no one could either hope or fear to see shaken in practice; which, in short (except, perhaps, during some temporary crisis), was in the common estimation placed beyond discussion."

removed from the irrepressible disputant of Mill's pages?

"Others, too,
There are among the walks of homely life
Shy and unpractised in the use of phrase;
* * *
Words are but under-agents in their souls,
When they are grasping with their greatest strength,
They do not breathe among them."*

A further point emerges when we consider the relation of discussion to action. It sometimes happens that an idea, by reason of its very vitality, may frustrate its own realisation and enactment. It is so, at any rate, with the idea of liberty. Not seldom liberty so inflames its votaries to assert the liberty to discuss that they cannot, and will not, see that in gratifying this passion for discussion they may be sacrificing the practical fruits, apart from which political discussion, at any rate, loses all its value. What spectator of parliaments is likely to deny that whilst the voluble rhetorician, the fanatic, and the bore are asserting what they call their "freedom of discussion," the sands may be running—not the sands of the hour-glass by which debate has sometimes been regulated, but the more precious sands of time and opportunity. "For God's sake! let us pass on," says Burke, exasperated out of all sobriety of phrase by the type of man who accepts nothing and questions everything.

All this, to be sure, need not make us desire that Mill, in the fervour of his pleas for liberty of discussion, had left even a sentence of that memorable chapter

* Wordsworth, "Prelude."

unwritten. It only prompts the wish that he had added even one paragraph upon the seasonable limitations imposed upon discussion in the interests of reverence, good sense, and practicality. The very limitations he admits do indeed but accentuate by their manifest meagreness the uncompromising emphasis of his doctrine.

The same line of criticism applies when we turn to liberty of action. Here also Mill's defects are the defects of his virtues. In its substance his teaching is incontrovertible. No one need dispute the central principle that vigorous many-sidedness of character can come only of varied practical contact with the manifold interests and ends of a many-sided environment. There is no other way. Human nature grows to the modes in which it is exercised. And the citizen of a State will remain but a truncated specimen of humanity, he will be mentally and morally mutilated (to use Adam Smith's emphatic word) so long as a narrow lot forbids his participation in the civic and social life, in the religious and intellectual opportunities which it is the mark of a civilised society to offer. This is the strength of Mill's position. The weakness appears in two exaggerations.

(1) The first is that in the eagerness of insistence that goodness ought to be various he forgets (as Fitzjames Stephen has it) that variety of character is not therefore goodness. It is not that goodness is not various. None but ascetics, whom Mill justly repudiates, would deny it. The virtues are many, and the more of them a man can realise without sacrifice of unity of character, the better he is. But, then, this unity must have its due. Without it the most engaging versatility passes at once across the line that parts the man of many

qualities however shining, from the man of principle and character. It is not to be denied that the type after Mill's heart lies open here to criticism. Moving at will within the monopoly of "self-regarding acts," free to indulge in eccentricities to his heart's content, he wonderfully recalls the democratic citizen of Platonic satire—that restless type who is "everything by turns and nothing long," because in his motley "particoloured" life the underlying consistency of a strong character has been lost.*

Yet, even if this be true, Mill's exaggerations here lie towards the safe extreme. Versatility is not the snare of the modern democratic citizen. The risk for him lies rather in the specialised life, the narrow lot and the poverty-stricken soul begotten of the sheer urgency of livelihood and the grinding preoccupation with material necessities. Lamentably small is the risk, deplorably distant is the prospect that a many-sided versatility will prove his snare.

(2) It is therefore a more needful criticism that in his eager plea for "individual vigour and manifold diversity" Mill falls into an extravagant tenderness for social experiments—social experiments, be it remembered, which are by no means incompatible with a narrow and contracted development in those who indulge in them. The health of a society, he even urges, or (to use his own words) "the amount of genius, mental vigour and moral courage it contains" is to be measured by the "amount of eccentricity" to be found within it. Non sequitur. It is one thing to admit that, in all societies that are full of life, "experiments in living" are to be expected: it is another

* "Republic," bk. viii. p. 561.

thing to welcome these vagaries as if they were a service to society. They are at best but the tributes of folly to freedom. For eccentricity is but the parody of individuality. And however true it be that fullness of life will produce experiments in living, experiments in living need by no means come of fulness of life. They may have quite another parentage in shallowness of nature, inconstancy of purpose, egregious vanity, impervious conceit, and fixed ideas. It is good to think for oneself, but, as Fitzjames Stephen suggests, it is not necessary that the man who thinks for himself should think differently from other people. This is the distinction to which Mill does insufficient justice. In the fervour of his passion for fulness of social life he is all too tender to the follies and freaks that may end in irresponsible squandering of life's resources.

The other side to this toleration of vagaries is the well-known antipathy to social interference which led Mill, in passages, to regard the mere refusal to bend the knee to social authority as a prime virtue. Nor is there any lack of forcible and vituperative phrase, "ape-like faculty of imitation," and such like, to make his utterance emphatic. And it may freely be admitted that the words and warnings have their value. For here, as elsewhere, it is the very strength and conviction with which Mill has grasped a truth, and the vehemence with which he urges it that have laid him open to attack. The truth in question is that there is a case, and a strong case, for *laissez-faire*, because in every developed human life there is, and must for ever remain, a large region within which whatever savours of coercion, and more especially of the coarse coercion of law, is either altogether impossible or in the highest degree inexpedient. This is a fact which no recogni-

tion of social solidarity or organic unity can alter. It cannot alter it because it is rooted in the very nature of man as a spiritual and moral being. It is so, for example, with Thought. Society of course can by organised action interfere with thought. It can do much to cut the sources from which thought is fed, it can even enforce an *index expurgatorius*. It can do even more by depriving thought of that free utterance which is an elementary condition of its health and vitality. Not without reason does Mill moralise over all the wealth of ideas which, so far as their diffusion goes, may have been stamped out by a brutal obscurantism. But thought itself no interference can touch. It cannot because—it cannot. For thought is, as the Stoics phrased it, the “inner citadel” within which even the humblest thinker owns no lord. As Spinoza taught, it is so entirely of the essence of a man’s being that it must needs persist so long as life lasts. Nothing that coercion can do can stifle it. Similarly with the religious spirit. Conceivably society might wage war upon religion ; or, more probably, it might set itself, for it has many instruments, to enforce religious conformity. But at most it could achieve no more than a comparatively superficial and illusory success. For the relation of the individual soul to God is so direct and so indescribably intimate that intervention between these two is flatly impossible. It is a relation that lies deeper than law can touch. A State religion, however enforced, could not create it, nor could a secularist persecution destroy it. For the religious spirit does not depend for its existence on the provision, or destruction, of religious facilities. Religion in its essence would no more perish if these facilities were swept away by a despotic secularism than it could be con-

jured into existence by their lavish provision. Indirectly the State may of course help or hinder ; directly it is impotent either to create the religious spirit or destroy it. As with religion so with morality. The old truism that men are not made moral by Act of Parliament is true. For morality is more than behaviour, more even than behaviour with such motives behind it as the State, or external pressure of any kind, can create. In its essence it stands or falls with that inward attitude of will, that dutiful spirit which lies deeper than the motives which the most powerful social authority can evoke. Even if all were done that the State can do (and it can do much) in providing moral education and smoothing the path for the realisation of human faculty, the root of the matter, the moral spirit, would still lie beyond its furthest reach. Nor is it otherwise in other relations of life which involve the deeper emotions and affections. Much as law may do for the family as an institution, it is beyond its sanctions to ensure those spontaneous affections and personal ties without which the family loses half its value and all its charm.

In all such cases as these, intervention with the individual finds natural and inexorable limits. It may remove obstacles, it may provide favourable conditions. But beyond this it is impotent. Nor is this all. In matters of religion and morality all interference is practised at a risk even in cases when it may be outwardly effective. A public authority could conceivably compel its subjects to attendance on Divine service : or it might treat infidelity to the marriage tie as a heinous crime. But it is doubtful if it would have thereby furthered the religious or the family life. The probability rather is, that by importing into such

things the baser alloy of threatened pains and penalties, it would have actually vitiated the motives of the persons so constrained. It is for these reasons that every citizen does well to foster, with Mill, a salutary jealousy of social interference. So long as much of the real significance of human action lies in the devout or dutiful or affectionate spirit, there will always be room for champions of *laissez-faire* to remind society that there are regions of experience where its interference is impertinent. So far, there seems little cause to quarrel with Mill's general result. No one who takes a spiritual view of human life and character can doubt that much that is best in human nature lies quite beyond the province of either the social or the legal sanction.*

The pity is that in his eager advocacy of this great truth Mill should have tried to set it on so inadequate, and, indeed, so false a ground—the well-known ground that human actions part into two, and that there is a charmed circle of "self-regarding acts," within which every individual is entitled to sit immune from all that society can or may wish to do. If interference is to be invoked at all, he will have it that it is solely because society is justified in doing what it can to protect this inviolable citadel against encroachment and attack. It is a conception that is indefensible from whatever point of view regarded. For in the first place, it is not the most self-regarding actions that furnish the strongest cases against interference. It is religious actions, or dutiful actions, or domestic actions which are in their significance nothing if not altruistic. And, secondly, a purely self-regarding action is no better than a figment. For even though it were granted that there were many actions

* Cf. the views of Green, p. 264.

in a man's life which leave little or no immediate mark upon the lives of others, it does not follow that such actions, however secret, however personal, leave no mark upon his own life, and the marks they leave on him go with him out into his work in and upon the world. Nothing can hinder this. A man is not one person in private secret acts, and another in public overt acts. He is one and the same person in both. His social value, or his want of social value, is the product of all his thoughts, feelings, and actions, whether he call them "self-regarding" or not. There are, of course, actions whose influence upon society at large are infinitesimal because their influence on the character of the doer of them is trifling: "de minimis non curatur." But if we go beyond these, what is it but a commonplace of experience that many a private man's whole social attitude and his life-long action on the world have been vitally determined by what Mill would call his "self-regarding acts." It is only an untenable atomism or a dangerous self-sophistication that can foster the illusion that in the hour of our "self-regarding actions," we are engaged in what concerns none but ourselves. To stake the plea against social despotism on this is to give the case away.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Mill holds to this figment of self-regarding acts only by an effort of dialectical skill which can hardly convince even the most friendly apologist. Now it is the hour of social conscience and we are bidden to play the rôle of critic of even the private follies of the fool: the scene changes, the hour of individualism comes, and we are reminded that we are "not to feel called upon to make his life uncomfortable." Now, as would appear,

we are bound to judge our neighbour and tell him plainly what we think about him. Nay, we may even shun his presence and warn our friends against him—so far is his private life from being purely his own concern. But, then, it *is* his own concern, so conspicuously his own concern that however we may be convinced of his fatuity, and however we may wish to sting him out of it by words that will go home, we are never to pass beyond a policy of remonstrance and polite persuasion. So hard is it even for a master of argument to reconcile the promptings of the social conscience with this *laissez-faire* individualism of “self-regarding acts.”*

Nor can we leave this topic without the reflection that it was surely by the irony of fate that it was reserved for Mill to become the protagonist of “self-regarding acts.” In his own devoted and strenuous life one suspects that self-regarding acts played but a slender part. To his friends he was apostolic, to his critics he was quixotic, in his championship of public causes. And when he retired in his closing days to Avignon it was with the reflection that much of the world’s best work had been done by those who lived remote from it. Similarly when we think of his writings. When he made the Greatest Happiness principle his creed, when he argued that self-sacrifice must find a place in Utilitarianism, when he avowed his sympathy with the religion of Humanity, when he argued for the paramount place of social feeling in morality, when he foresaw the coming of a day when “a common man” would “dig and weave as readily as fight for his country,” nay, when he was arguing that

* “On Liberty,” c. iv.

the recognition of the charmed circle of inviolable personality was the path to Greatest Happiness, he was himself administering the best antidote to his untenable doctrine of "self-regarding acts."

A final criticism remains. Professor Bain, who never fails to deal faithfully with his friend, has said that the weakness of the essay "On Liberty" lies in the want of a steady view of the essentials of human happiness.* It is a fair criticism, and it applies not only to the essay, but to Mill's writings as a whole. For though few writers have so fully recognised the manifold elements of human well-being, or moved amidst them with more habitual familiarity, it cannot be claimed for him that we rise from his works with a compact and well-proportioned ideal of the Public Good. We have fragments. Such is the chapter on "The Stationary State," or the passage in the "Utilitarianism" already cited, or what he called his "Utopia" of Co-operation. Yet the fact remains that, if there be a compact and connected ideal of happiness discoverable in Mill's writings, the reader is left to piece it together for himself.

And yet this criticism, however just, is no sooner spoken than one almost wishes it unsaid. For, after all, the student of Mill will find in his writings and in his life what is of more value than even a closely-knit and symmetrical ideal of human happiness. He will meet a powerful mind of the first rank in living contact with problems, a thinker whose net was spread in the large currents of the thought of his time. There was a tendency in Mill's own day to regard him as a manufactured thinker, a conduit for other men's

* Bain's "J. S. Mill," p. 106.

ideas, "a logic-chopping engine," as anything, in short, rather than a living intellectual force. "Sawdustish" was John Sterling's epithet. And even in our own day one suspects there remains an impression to the same effect. But if the study of Mill's life and writings is fitted to press home one conviction more than another, it is that his was a mind open, independent, and alive. "To the last," he modestly declares, "I continued to learn and to unlearn." From the first he began to do so. Despotically educated by his father, who was without doubt one of the most masterful intellects of his generation, and brought up at the feet of Bentham himself, his mind was not subjugated even by these great twin influences. He had the vitality to go his own way, to think his own thoughts, "to learn from other minds," and to leave behind him a greater thing than Benthamism. The very strictures of his severest critics may be read as a kind of tribute. Jevons has assailed the inconsistencies of his "bad logic" and faulty ethics. Fitzjames Stephen has impeached the inconsistencies of his political and social creed. And many lesser critics than these have subsisted on Mill's failures. Yet the sympathetic student of Mill can afford to make all his critics welcome to all his inconsistencies. For his inconsistencies come of the vigour of his mental life. They are born of the desire to know, of the capacity and willingness to learn from other minds, of the sense of the reality of the many problems in whose presence he habitually lived. This is, after all, the greater matter. Better Mill's "inconsistencies" than the limited completeness of Bentham. Better his unsolved difficulties than the arrogant, narrow, self-confident logic of his father. For they are, at any rate, the fruits of an

enlarged outlook and an enriched experience. Has he not said it? "If I am asked," he writes in the "Autobiography," "what system of political philosophy I substituted for that which as a philosophy I had abandoned, I answer: No system, only a conviction that the true system was something much more complete and many-sided than I had previously had any idea of." In the light of a confession of faith such as this, we can understand that, if Mill had given fewer openings to critics, he would have given less convincing proof of his real greatness.

RICHARD COBDEN

THE COMMERCIAL RADICALISM OF COBDEN

I.

TRADE.

COBDEN loved to avow himself “a practical man.” He regarded time as wasted which was not given to the concrete good of his fellow-countrymen. He had an uncommon impatience of abstractions, and more than a suspicion of theories and theorists. The one university in which he studied was what he called “that great peripatetic political university, the League.” He had sat at the feet of no Gamaliel except Adam Smith. And even here, despite his enthusiastic claim for political economy as “the highest exercise of the human mind,” his concern was not with the science itself, but with some of its applications. His reading, though voracious enough in Hansard and Blue Books and pamphlets, was not otherwise extensive. In short, he was from first to last a politician.

He was, however, likewise a thinker. He might pride himself—as he often did—upon being “a man of facts,” but it was his greater merit to be a man to whom facts had become significant. Through all the facts and figures of his speeches there runs the tendency to lift up current controversies into the region of principles, and the steady perception that

what he took to be the main elements of a nation's life hang together in organic connection. With the result that from his speeches and pamphlets—concrete, practical, scornful of abstractions though they be—there emerged, if not “a philosophy of civilisation,” at any rate a coherent reasoned scheme of what he would have not only England but all countries become.

Central and dominant lies the conviction of the magnitude of the industrial and commercial element in modern civilisation. For when Cobden (he was born in 1804) looked out upon the world in early manhood as commercial traveller, he saw that an industrial revolution had passed, and was still passing, over the face of England. It is not necessary to dwell on the familiar details—mechanical inventions, growth of the factory system, rise of great towns around coal-fields and iron-fields, swift expansion of seaports, with increase of capitalists and labourers, and all the adjuncts of these, good and evil. “Between the date of Waterloo and the date of the Reform Act, the power-looms in Manchester had increased from 2,000 to 80,000, and the population of Birmingham had grown from 90,000 to 150,000.” This is one of his notes, and it may be taken as typical of the kind of facts that fastened upon his mind and fired his imagination. In brief, the national industries were undergoing that transformation, so familiar to us nowadays, through which the dominance of agriculture was giving place to the supremacy of manufactures.

And, then, Cobden did not bound his views by England. A wide traveller, a keen observer, “an international man,” his eyes were constantly upon other countries, and especially upon the United States.

It was not simply that the rise and growth of the American Democracy bulked to him as the greatest event of the modern world. It was also that its possibilities profoundly concerned the future of industrial England.

“In that portentous truth, the Americas are free, teeming as it does with future change, there is nothing that more nearly affects our industry than the total revolution which it dictates to the statesmen of Great Britain in the commercial, colonial, and foreign policy of our Government.”*

For, in American democracy, Cobden saw two things which deeply moved him. It was a great political experiment—democracy upon its trial. “Don’t ask me to wish that it may fail,” he exclaims, in the day of America’s ordeal. But it was also, and indeed to Cobden mainly, the rise of an industrial and commercial rival formidable beyond all precedent. To realise what that meant it needed but to look at this picture and that. England, loaded with national debt, densely populated, crowded with discontented farmers, half-fed labourers, mutinous Chartist operatives, costly paupers, ruled by a Corn-lawing aristocracy, impoverished by outlay on great armaments by land and sea. How could a country like this hope to contend in the markets of the world with that great coming rival of the West—that rival with her vast territory and all but limitless natural resources; with her Mississippi Valley potentially able to feed the entire population of Europe; with her freedom from debt; with her thrice-happy isolation from the intrigues of diplomatists and the aggressiveness of armies; with her

* “Russia,” c. iv.

elastic prosperity, her light taxes, her Anglo-Saxon labour, her public education, her genius for mechanical inventions?

With this before him, Cobden drew his inferences. He saw the coming of that industrial rivalry which has since come—and from other quarters besides the West. And it was this perception more than any other thing which shaped within him the conviction that the policy of England must be a policy of trade. Unquestionably he built here upon facts of the first magnitude. He spoke the simple truth when he said that “a new dispensation” had come. The whole superstructure of our life had come—like another Venice on its piles—to be under-propped by industry and commerce. A vast and ever-growing organism of production had to be itself perpetually reproduced. A swiftly increasing industrial population had to be found in work, wages, food, and shelter. A rapidly growing class of capitalists and employers had to find investments, or succumb. Armaments of the costliest by land and sea had to be paid for. Dividends on debt had to be met, municipalities financed, hospitals, charities, schools, churches supported. In a word, England was becoming industrialised and commercialised to the core.

Herein, as Cobden thought, lay the fatal failure of so many of the statesmen of his day, Whig and Tory alike. They were the slaves of an old tradition. They were thinking about everything but the main thing—about foreign policy, balance of power, diplomatic interventions, armaments, constitutional changes and franchises. But the key of the situation (as Cobden thought) lay in none of these things, not even in the last. It lay in trade—trade which had

grown and was continuing to grow so vast that it was more and more sweeping into its vortex all the other elements of national life.* This made Cobden pre-eminently the apostle of trade. And though there was room in his soul for much besides trade and tariffs, it was in the region of economic facts and forces that as a public man he lived, moved, and had his being. That the policy of England must be a policy of trade; and, if of trade, then of Free Trade—this is the pith of all his teaching. A satirist of genius has called Cobden a bagman—“bag-man with his Calico Millennium.” And the jibe has been often repeated. It cannot be repeated too often if it helps to fix the fact that the day is past when statesmanship can afford to be ignorant of the economic facts and forces of the world.

But then (as just remarked) it was not a policy of trade merely that could satisfy Cobden. As all the world knows, he went on to argue that a policy of trade must also—and always—be a policy of Free Trade.

There can be little doubt that the series of memorable speeches which Cobden made, in the House and in the country, upon Free Trade have, in singular measure, the quality of being convincing. They converted Peel by their “unadorned eloquence”—as Peel himself testified. And they can hardly fail to convince the reader that, at the time when they were spoken—1840 onwards—it had become of paramount importance for British manufacturers that the country should draw from every source available

* *E.g.* “I believe that the speculative philosopher of 1000 years hence will date the greatest revolution that ever happened in the world’s history from the triumph of the principle which we have met here to advocate” (*i.e.*, Free Trade). Speech, January 15, 1846.

abundant food, cheap raw material, and cheap instruments of production. We can see this in the light of what has happened since. England, we can see now, was then in a position of immense industrial strength, actual and potential; her manufacturing system had potentialities which were to beggar even Cobden's anticipations; her commerce had vast capacities of growth; her agriculture had still possibilities of expansion; she had access to growing markets whose appetite to consume her goods was to prove for many years insatiable. Not least, she had a clear start of her rivals. Thus situated, she was called to face a parting of the ways. And it may serve the purposes of exposition to ask: What would probably have happened had she chosen to persist in the path of Protection, as nearly all other nations have done?

It would be futile to dogmatise on the unverifiable might-have-been. Actual history is so hard to write that we may well leave hypothetical history alone. It will suffice to indulge the conjecture that this nation, like other protected nations, would have made substantial industrial and commercial progress. Those who believe that Free Trade has been salvation need not therefore believe that Protection would have been reprobation. It is not necessary thus to traffic in extremes. Doubtless, manufactures would have gone on advancing, inventions multiplying, facilities of transport and locomotion increasing. There were such potentialities in these things, as we know now, that we cannot think otherwise. England, in short, would have probably done at least as well as other protected countries.

If so, this growth of manufactures would have entailed results. It would have (there is little doubt)

brought with it growth of working population; and growth of population, especially if hand in hand with a rise in the standard of comfort, would have brought increased demand for food. Hardly anything could have prevented it. And this would have been an excellent thing—especially for the landed interest. For if agriculture had continued to be protected, and the demand for food gone up, the labourer might have been kept on the land, the farmer even ceased to grumble, and the landlord enjoyed his rents. Meanwhile the operatives of factory, foundry, building-yard and workshop would, of course, have had their wages—good wages, we shall assume, seeing that manufactures, on our supposition, had been prospering. But, unhappily, their wages, even if they had been good, would have soon begun to lose their charm by being increasingly absorbed in the purchase of food kept dear by a protective tariff. And so, we may imagine, matters would have gone on till sooner or later the very fact of industrial progress, without any argument, would have opened the eyes of the nation to the full significance of the fact that this country, having decisively thrown in its lot with manufactures, must be content to import a large and an increasing proportion of its food. For, even if it were granted, as has been alleged, that it is within the limits of physical possibility that Great Britain could grow food enough to feed its people, this mere physical possibility is not worth considering. It could only be realised by pushing the margin of cultivation up the bare hill-sides and into the upland moors. And long before that process had reached its limits the cost of produce would have become so great that even the well-paid workman, when he had purchased his meals, would have

found that he had little, if anything, left wherewith to purchase anything else.

Now it was the merit of Cobden to see this without waiting for any such object lesson. He read the signs of the times. He discerned with utmost clearness the industrial revolution that had taken place. He knew that the national industries were changing. He was convinced that, year by year, we were becoming more and more a nation of manufacturers. And he argued that, in becoming such, we must make up our minds increasingly to import our food. But, of course, he did not stop there. Without a shadow of hesitation he took the further step to "free food."

It is interesting to note that in taking this, his characteristic step, he does not seem to have anticipated that food would be much cheapened. He says so: "We do not seek Free Trade in corn primarily for the purpose of purchasing it at a cheaper money rate." * Of course he saw that Free Trade in corn would make an end of scarcity prices and agricultural monopoly. And it was in this connection that he was wont to declare that the Corn Law was a rent law and nothing else. † But it is none the less true that his eyes were set not so much on cheap food as on abundant food, and on the industrial expansion and efficiency which abundant food would bring. ‡ In face of an industrial population increasing like a rising torrent—at the rate of 1000 a day, he once said §—it was essential to

* Speech, July 3, 1844.

† Speech, July 3, 1844. He even went further in calling it "An extension of a system of pauperism to the whole of the landed aristocracy." February 24, 1842.

‡ This has been clearly pointed out by Professor Cunningham.

§ Speech, October 28, 1845.

secure two things: one, that abundance of food supply without which labour could not be efficient; the other, a check upon monopoly prices of corn—monopoly prices which, by dearness of bread, would divert ultimately into the pocket of the landed interest an undue proportion of the wages of labour, thereby leaving less available for stimulating the demand in other commodities besides food. These two things, Cobden was convinced, were best secured—and beyond all question they were effectively secured—by sweeping away the Corn Laws by the board. But he seems to have been equally convinced that all this could be done, and yet agricultural prices be so well maintained as to leave farmers their profits and landlords their rents. Did he not style himself “the farmer’s friend?” Did he not declare that “the repeal of the Corn Laws would not throw an acre of land out of cultivation”?* Did he not even prophesy that there was “no interest in the country that would receive so much benefit from the repeal of the Corn Laws as the farmer-tenant industry”?† Partly it was that the farmer enjoyed the “natural protection” equivalent to the cost of transport of the foreign article, but partly also the increased demand for produce, which Cobden believed was certain to come from the expansion of industries all round under the bettering influences of Free Trade policy.‡ There was another prophecy—that memorable one in which, despite his denunciations of the Corn Law as a rent law, he tried to persuade his particular foes—the

* Speech, October 19, 1843.

† Speech, October 24, 1844.

‡ *E.g.*—Speech, January 15, 1845. “If you will give freedom to the commerce of this country, and let loose the energies of the people, their ability to consume corn and provisions brought from abroad will increase faster than the quantity imported, whatever it may be.”

landowners—that they would have “as good rents without a Corn Law as with it.”* So little did he anticipate the extent to which cheapness would go, and land fall out of tillage.

Not that these prophecies were utterly false. The tenant-farmer was prosperous enough after Free Trade—for a time (till 1870, at any rate). Nor is it to be forgotten that the same Free Trade policy which shattered the landlord monopoly in agriculture has, by stimulating the growth of cities, made even the barrenest of acres extraordinarily fruitful of ground rents, as those who dwell in cities know. It was not of this, however—not of the “unearned increment” from land—that Cobden was thinking when he tried to console the landlords. And it need not be denied that his sanguine optimism here betrayed him into prophecies flagrantly false. The decay of agriculture, involving a loss which when capitalised has been made by experts to run into large figures, must always be reckoned in any estimate of Free Trade policy.† Yet the miscalculation cannot be said to invalidate Cobden’s central argument. Can it be denied that the Corn Law was bound up with monopoly—that it was essentially “a rent law”? Can it be denied that abundance of cheap food had become vital to English industry? Can it be denied that the repeal of the Corn Laws ensured a supply of cheap food? If it cannot, we are far on the way to an approval of Cobden’s policy as to the import of food. There is a tale that in 1845, when

* Speech, May, 1843. “The Land Owners have nothing pecuniarily, they have nothing ultimately, to dread from a Free Trade in Corn.” September 28, 1843.

† See Professor Cunningham’s “Rise and Decline of the Free Trade Movement,” p. 106.

Cobden had, in the House, finished what Mr. Morley thinks the best of his speeches, the Protectionists were heard to whisper, "Peel must answer this." Peel, so the story runs, crumpled up his notes, as he was heard to mutter, "Let those answer him who can." If there are those who do not relish the words as a confession, it is always open to them to read them as a challenge.

Imported food, however, must of course be purchased. It must be paid for in exports (visible or "invisible"), as must also be those various other things which we need but cannot profitably, or it may be cannot at all produce for ourselves.

Now Cobden's policy for exports is of the simplest. It is all summed up in one word—cheapness. It is cheapness that will enable us to hold our home markets against the foreigner; it is cheapness that will enable us to secure the open markets of the world against rival exporters; it is cheapness that will enable us even to pierce the hostile tariff-walls of foreign markets. Nothing else will do. Diplomacy, flags, fleets, armaments are futile in comparison. We cannot dragoon the world, not even our own colonies, into taking our goods. That "policy of the cudgel" is obsolete. What remains is to persuade and entice by the cheapness that appeals to that deeply-rooted instinct to buy in the cheapest market. Never was there such a prophet of cheapness. "The fight is for commercial supremacy, and the battle will rest with the cheapest."* But if we must have cheapness, our course is so clear that common sense (to which Cobden is always appealing) is enough to point it out. We must secure from all available sources, and at the least possible cost, raw

* "Russia," c. iv.

material and products partly manufactured, and the instruments of production, and out of these turn out the finished product, which, by the "Open Sesame" of cheapness, will force its way into the markets of the world. This is the trite and simple case for free imports all round. It stands in need of no words to commend it. Stated thus abstractly, it is all but self-evident. To bring abundance of stuff at least cost, whether raw material or partly manufactured goods, to the door of the workshop, and to equip the workshop, at least cost, with every inventive appliance and every economy that the whole world can afford—this is the open secret of producing the cheap article. Protection prevents this. Protection, in short, is obstruction. It is a way of preventing people from getting things. It is equivalent to asking producers to revert to less easy methods; and, so far, it has been said, truly enough, that it is not in essence different from asking a farmer to reap by sickle instead of machine, or a manufacturer to prefer hand-loom to steam-power machinery. Such things make production difficult and costly. So does Protection.*

And, indeed, so convinced was Cobden that, by removal of these protective obstacles, industry would advance by leaps and bounds, that he believed (as we have seen) that the expansion of cheap manufacture, by providing employment and by increasing the demand for food, would prevent the farmer and the land-owner from suffering at all. Foreign markets won, and home markets held by cheapness, with agriculture—that greatest of all industries—sustained by increasing

* See Dr. James Bonar's "Elements of Political Economy."

working population and increasing demand for food—this was Cobden's expectation.

But this was not all. His *immediate* aim, of course, was to convert this country. But all through his agitation he never doubted that by converting Britain he was but beginning the conversion of Europe—the very rapid conversion of Europe. “There will not be a tariff in Europe,” so runs the unfulfilled prophecy, “which will not be changed *in less than five years* to follow your example.”* For it was not an insular or one-sided Free Trade that could content him—though he never hesitated to prefer that to Protection. His expectations went out to nothing less than a complete international division of labour, under which the production of the whole world would be maximised, and the wants of each several country supplied on a basis of a free international exchange of commodities. Nor did this exhaust his outlook. Though fundamentally the movement was economic, it had other, it had political aims. It was democratic inasmuch as it struck at the political no less than at the economic monopoly of the landed aristocracy, thereby profoundly altering the political centre of gravity. But above all, it was to be not only the harbinger but the cause of Peace, and the breaking down of hostile barriers between nation and nation. “Free Trade!” he cries in one of his most vehement passages. “What is it? Why, breaking down the barriers that separate nations; these barriers behind which nestle the feelings of pride, revenge, hatred, and jealousy, which every now and then burst their bounds and deluge whole countries with blood!”† Even this did not suffice him. For

* Speech, January 15, 1846.

† Speech, September 28, 1843.

when his battle was won, it was not enough for him to claim that he had carried through a great policy for the England of 1846. He went far further. In the pardonable enthusiasm of Free Trade victory, he claimed to have proved free trade *for all places and all times*. To him Free Trade principles were "eternal truths." He likens them to the law of gravitation. He calls Free Trade "the international law of the Almighty." He asserts it to be an exemplification of the Golden Rule of Christianity. "We have a principle established now," he says in 1846, "which is eternal in its truth and universal in its application, and must be applied in all nations and throughout all times."*

This is the voice of enthusiasm rather than of economics. But as it was both meant and taken seriously, it invites the remark that, to say the least, it was not the voice of worldly wisdom. It was not necessary for Cobden's practical purpose to prove so much. He might well have been content to prove that Free Trade was the sound policy for the England of his day. Unfortunately, he went on to asseverate in those somewhat wild and whirling generalisations, that because it was sound then it was sound for ever. Looked at theoretically, this was all too bold a stride. The thinker in politics, especially since the middle of the nineteenth century, has been coming to understand how wide is the step from a commercial policy, however sound, to an eternal truth. Even long before, Burke had declared that nothing universal could be affirmed in political subject-matter, and the growth of the historical and comparative method under the hands of Maine and others has gone far to support the

* Speech, July 4, 1846.

statement. Who can deny that it has been one of the decisive results of nineteenth century political thought to reinstate, in the light of the wider outlook on history and politics, the ancient but still living deliverance of Aristotle that between the rigorous universals of science and the looser generalisations of politics there lies, in the very nature of political subject-matter, a world of difference? This being so, it is not for the practical politician to rush in where the political theorist fears to tread. Yet this is precisely what Cobden does, and he has to pay the inevitable penalty. For the man who traffics in universals does so at a risk; he lays himself open to attack; he forgets that an "eternal truth," so called, is really the most vulnerable of propositions. It has the weakness that, if it proved false in a single case, it goes to the ground at once. Illustration is not far to seek. There are hostile critics of Free Trade who point to the fact that J. S. Mill has admitted that protection may be the best policy for new countries: * they think that therefore Free Trade stands refuted. There are other hostile critics who think that they can prove that Free Trade is not the policy for 1906, and they too think that therefore Free Trade stands refuted. They are both right in the inference (whatever be the value of their premisses) if Free Trade stands or falls as an "eternal truth." But it need not stand refuted at all if only it be advanced, with judicious moderation, as what it was meant for—a sound commercial policy for England at a particular epoch in her history. The theorist, perhaps, may be pardoned for indulging in sweeping generalisations: it is his nature to generalise. But let the practical man

* Mill's "Political Economy," bk. v. c. x.

remember that the width of a generalisation in practical politics is so far from being a security that it does but offer a larger target for the shafts of the unbelieving.

Nor can Cobden be acquitted here of giving a fatally false lead to his followers. The confident sweeping generalisations of the master have betrayed the disciples into an illusion of false security. Convincing that in 1846 Free Trade was proved up to the hilt, they seem to have come to regard it as therefore proved, as Cobden said it was, once for all. Nay, they even seem at times to resent its being so much as called in question. And they might, of course, be justified even in their irritability if Free Trade were an eternal truth. Mankind, or at least the practical part of it, have no time and less patience to submit to be called upon to prove eternal truths over and over again. Yet it would certainly have been better for Cobdenites if instead of assuming their cherished policy to be a truth never again to be called in question by reasonable men, they had set themselves to prove it afresh, to prove it, for example, to be no less sound for 1906 than Cobden (as they believe) proved it sound for 1846. It would really be a greater tribute to their master if, instead of reposing on his enthusiastic, unguarded and untenable "eternal truth," they emulated him in the courage, the tenacity, the lucidity, the wide grasp of fact, with which in his day he attacked the problem of the hour. For the reasonable claim which the anxious political enquirer may to the last of time make on the Cobdenite is not the mere resuscitation of the abstract economic principles upon which the Free Trade policy was victoriously argued, nor yet the proof that it was the highest wisdom to apply these principles as Cobden did with such effect in the Free

Trade controversy. It is rather the claim for a modest appendix, containing a careful diagnosis of the body politic as it is here and now, and a demonstration that the actual state of things industrially and politically renders a continuance of Free Trade nationally expedient.

This is the more desirable because since Cobden's day such vast changes, both political and commercial, have passed over England and the world. A brief consideration of at least some of these is essential.

One of the greatest is undoubtedly the growth, both in fact and in idea, of that spirit of nationality which is perhaps the most forceful and pregnant political movement of the present age. We can see its influence in that very domain which Cobden had made peculiarly his own. For the tariff controversies that vex the beginnings of the twentieth century are much more than the divergencies of politicians and of parties. There lies behind them a conflict between principles whose magnitude we can hardly yet gauge—a conflict between the essentially cosmopolitan ideal of Cobden, which would fain level the "barriers" between nation and nation, and encourage capital and labour to move freely whithersoever investment and employment might beckon them, and the very different ideal which, accepting the rivalries between nations as a cardinal fact, cannot forget these dividing barriers; so much so that it does not hesitate, in the interests of national (or imperial) strength and unity, to pursue a strictly national policy even to the extent of demanding enormous and at times appalling sacrifices of the citizen. For it cannot be supposed that anyone is likely to call in question the strength and the vitality of the spirit of nationality. It is not merely that the nations of the world struggle, as they have always

struggled, sometimes in peace and sometimes in war, to assert their existence and achieve their ambitions. Their self-assertion has become more conscious, more deliberate, more resolute. Sometimes it takes one form, sometimes another. It may be the unification of a nation, as in Italy; or the consolidation of a military empire, as in Germany; or the emergence of a great state, heretofore aloof, in the arena of world politics, as in the case of the United States; or it may be a craving for colonial expansion or a hunger for spheres of influence. Whatever the form it may take, it is there, and it is one of the most irresistible of political forces at this moment.

Nor is it only in the wider politics that this leaven of nationality has been working. It has made itself felt also in that ideal of citizenship which has been gaining ground since the middle of the nineteenth century. For is it not of the very essence of this ideal of citizenship that the citizen and the nation are bound together by bonds more intimate, more organic than was previously supposed? So that while, on the one hand, the citizen is declared to need the nation and active democratic participation in the affairs of the nation, in order to realise a true citizenship, so, on the other hand, the nation, if it is to be a really organised nation, strong both for defence and for the working out of its destinies, must be able to reckon upon the absolute loyalty and devotion of its citizens.

Now it is not to be assumed that this spirit of nationality is irreconcilable with cosmopolitanism and its "breaking down of barriers between nation and nation!" On the contrary, he who sets the idea of the nation in irreconcilable antagonism with the idea of mankind runs serious risk of destroying, or at least

impairing, both. For a genuine cosmopolitanism is doubtfully possible, as Coleridge declared, except by antecedence of patriotism. It is the natural law of the growth of sentiments and ideas that they pass out to foreigner, slave or savage, after they have found soil and nurture in the narrower and intenser relations of citizen to citizen. On the other hand, it is not less true, as Mazzini passionately urged, that the nation will never be seen in its true character till it is valued as a supreme instrument resolutely to be used in the service of humanity. Nor did Cobden himself cease to be a patriot by becoming cosmopolitan. He was oftener taunted with preaching a gospel of narrow national self-interest. Yet it is not the less true that the idea of the nation and the idea of mankind may come into conflict exceedingly acute. Adjustment between the two is far from easy. And this is manifest the moment we pass to a second of the signs of the times—the conspicuous vitality of the spirit of Protection.

It is matter of fact that the vitality of the Protective spirit has falsified all Cobden's forecasts. And it is not to be wondered at. For Cobden's eye was upon Trade. And it is not considerations of Trade alone that have maintained and built tariff-walls. In that case they would not be so formidable; they might fall before Free Trade arguments. No; these tariff-walls which stand so firm, which show no signs of crumbling, are due to the alliance of trade with the spirit of nationality. For this spirit of nationality, to which the national interests are paramount, looks upon markets from a different point of view from that of cosmopolitan Cobden, who would fain have opened all the markets of all the world to everybody. It does not concern itself much with the world as a whole. It does not think of

levelling the barriers between nations. It thinks first, and sometimes it also thinks last, of securing markets for the national industries. Its instinct is for monopoly—a large, a *national* monopoly, but still monopoly. And if it can handicap, or exclude altogether, other nations from its own home markets, or oust them in foreign markets, or monopolise spheres of influence, the probability is that it will try to do so. It has no aspirations after an international division of labour. It lends no ear to Free Trade theories. It is deeply dipped in the spirit not only of industrial but of political rivalry. And though it may be denounced by Free Traders as fatuous and as defeating its own ends by its fiscal follies, it is not shaken: it goes on. For the reason why it does not accept Free Trade arguments is not that it cannot understand them. They are not at all hard to understand. The reason is that it looks at the facts—the facts of trade and commerce—from a different point of view. Nor can there be a doubt that it is a sincere belief in the strength and vitality of this point of view that has awakened in many minds those fears and warnings with which we have been recently made so familiar—fears lest this country might come, by the action of its rivals, to be circumscribed in that access to markets upon which (as Cobden so clearly saw) it depends not only for the disposal of its wares, but even for the food which its exports purchase and must continue to purchase if, as a nation, it is to hold its own.

It is anything but easy to say whether such fears are well founded. Let those pronounce who know the facts of the commercial world; still more let those who are competent to forecast the commercial future. One may hazard the opinion that Cobden would not have been disquieted by them. So firm was his faith in cheapness,

so complete was his confidence that England could afford to go upon her own way in indifference to what the rest of the world might do. And yet it is as well that those who have all, and even more than all, Cobden's optimism should bear in mind that it is not merely over Protection as a commercial policy that the gospel of cheapness has to win its victory. What it really has to encounter is Protection in alliance with the masterful and ambitious spirit of Nationality which has been going on from strength to strength since Cobden's day.

But, of course, it is not in regard to foreign markets only that anxieties have arisen. Rightly or wrongly, yet very genuinely, the fear has entered into many minds that the policy of free imports, by the killing or the crippling of home industries unable to hold their own in the battle of cheapness, is hastening the coming of the day when employment may fail.

Now Cobdenites have never failed to see that some of a nation's industries may be crippled or even killed by free imports. They have viewed the possibility with calmness, not because they denied the fact, but because they were content with the compensations. Their equanimity has usually rested upon the economic commonplace that when labour is displaced from one industry, this only means that it will move to other industries within the country, in which it can be applied with more effect. Nor is the process the less really matter for rejoicing because it may have its unpleasant incidents. And if it should happen that this result does not ensue, even if there should be a diminution of employment in a country, labour is not nonplussed and left in idleness. For can it not move to other shores, there to apply itself with more effect under that international division of labour towards which

even insular Free Trade is a step? In this case the world will be the gainer. The world will be the gainer because it is thus that labour will feel its way to those countries where it will be most effective. And so the production of the world, as a whole, and the exchange of industrial products, will be increased.

Now it is easy to imagine a nation for which these compensations are entirely satisfactory, even in the face of much crippling of special industries, and even in the face of much displacement of labour. For a nation might unquestionably stand in such a position of industrial strength that it could even welcome the loss of many industries. For it could always turn to other industries in which, by dint of national resources and industrial aptitudes, it could afford to laugh at all foreign competition. And when such industries were large and numerous, or both, they might easily absorb all and more than all the labour which might have been driven from such ousted industries as had gone down before the foreigner. The last state of that country would be better than the first. In its first state it was, economically speaking *misdirecting* labour into channels much better, in the interests of all concerned, left to the foreigner; in its last state it would have concentrated its labour upon those industries where it could work with maximum efficiency, and without any fear that employment might fail.

Such was the position of this country as regarded by Cobden. The Free Trade policy was undoubtedly, in his eyes, not only a policy of plenty but a policy of employment. His critics said that his movement was a middle-class movement—a manufacturers' movement, not a working-man's movement. They even affirmed

that his zeal for Free Trade in corn was a plan for lowering wages by cheapening food. The criticism will not stand. Cobden's appeal may have been mainly addressed to the middle classes (as was natural under the existing franchise), but the benefits were not to be limited to them. For apart altogether from the fact (already touched upon) that Cobden believed that the price of food would be well maintained, he was convinced, if he was convinced of anything, that Free Trade would increase employment to an enormous extent; so much so that his belief that the price of corn would be well maintained, owing to an ever-increasing demand, may be regarded as a measure of the confidence he felt that Free Trade was the sure path to employment.

But then, of course, the situation has changed since Cobden's day. Rivals have come of age. An industrial revolution has passed over other countries as well as over England. And for various reasons, which we need not specify, the competition of the foreigner in home markets has become more acute than Cobden could foresee. Hence these alarms lest employment may fail, and the recrudescence, though in changed guise, of questions which Cobden believed he had laid for ever. Is England, as a matter of fact, still in a position of such industrial and commercial strength that she can afford to laugh at all competition, and even regard the downfall of some of her industries as a blessing in disguise? Are her industries so thriving as to be likely to absorb, and to continue to absorb, whatever labour may be displaced by foreign competition in home markets? Such are the issues that have once more been forced to the front by the changing conditions of national life. Nor is it

possible to wish that they had not been raised. Not only have they breathed a new vitality into Cobdenism. They have also helped to define more unmistakably the Cobdenite position. For it is not the distinctive characteristic of the Cobdenite that his answer to these questions is a Yes, in contradiction of a protectionist No. His unwavering position, if he hold fast to his orthodoxy, is that even if the answer were No, the Free Trade policy is not to be altered. Recourse to protection would but make a bad situation worse, and consolation would lie in the reflection that, if it must needs be that employment fail, the labour displaced can move to other lands there to find the work and wages denied to it in its own.

It is here that the believers in nationality can no longer follow. They contemplate the contingency with dismay. To them, emigration of labour on any considerable scale appears a symptom of political as well as of economic decadence. To them it would mean a loss of loyal citizens, and a transfer of them possibly to rival nations—a transfer in the first instance of their industrial efficiency, but in due course also of their political allegiance. Nor could Cobdenite consolations avail here. No economic gain, however great, to the individual workman, or to the world at large, could satisfy these champions of nationality if it left the nation politically weaker.

Hence the peculiar anxiety with which possible failure of employment is regarded by those to whom national strength has become a paramount object. Their fear is not economic only, it is political. And it is this fear, and not merely their apprehensions for the future of industry, that has led some of them to avow their readiness to meet possible

failure of employment by a policy that is no longer Cobdenite Free Trade.

Such persons, however, though at one in their readiness to depart from Cobdenism, may divide into two classes. The one class consists of those who are convinced that it is not beyond the wit of man to devise a fiscal policy which will secure an industrial prosperity such as persistence in Free Trade could never bring, thereby averting that failure of employment which (in their view) Free Trade cannot obviate. To these, Free Trade is no longer the best policy even for industry. But not all who are ready to depart from Free Trade need be of this persuasion. There are others who, though Cobdenite enough to hold that Free Trade may still remain the best policy for trade, are frankly prepared to dissent from the further Cobdenite maxim that what is best for trade must needs be best for the nation. Such seems to be the significance of the suggestion that it might be far-sighted wisdom in a nation (or empire) to face some economic sacrifice if by this it could safeguard its political strength, unity, and destinies. This, to be sure, is a policy that would call for not a little proof. To Cobden, as we have seen, it seemed all but axiomatic that when a country has been industrialised and commercialised to the core, no policy that involved economic sacrifice could make for genuine political strength. It may be that in this he was mistaken. He was not infallible. His forecasts were sometimes false. But at any rate his arguments stand written in his life, and above all, in his speeches. "Let those answer him who can."

II

NON-INTERVENTION

It is not possible to do full justice to Cobden's policy of Trade till we see it linked, as in his mind it was indissolubly linked, with his policy of Peace. For though, in the order of his thought, Trade is the central fact, and Peace is urged for the sake of Trade rather than otherwise, the two things so interact that they are but two aspects of one policy.

Cobden's apostleship of Peace does not rest solely on economic grounds. War (except for defence) was to him a sin and a crime; a "brutaliser of the masses," a "multitudinous immorality," a "damnable trade." Neither he nor Bright hesitates to invoke religion and morality against it. Indeed, it is precisely the combination of this spiritual appeal with common sense (a powerful alliance) that is one of the secrets of their influence. Yet Cobden's arguments are essentially economic. "I thank God," he once said, "we live in a time when it is impossible for Englishmen ever to make a war profitable."* This was the thought that was uppermost in his mind, and in it lies the pith of his case—a case which is surely one of the strongest indictments of war ever penned.

In certain aspects the economic argument against war is of the easiest. It is obvious that war misdirects wealth and labour into work that is, to say the least, unproductive. For though dockyards and arsenals produce much, their products are not instruments of production. These serve their purpose, and in time

* Speech, Foreign Policy, November 23, 1864.

wear out; and meanwhile the world is none the better for them in its ceaseless struggle against the inexorable perishability of wealth. The inventions of war are astonishing, and its energies prodigious, often heroic. But, in the long run, they all mean one thing—the diversion of material resources away from channels in which they not only produce, but help further production, into channels in which they serve a contrary purpose. And, as this voracious, economically-barren consumption in armaments has to be made good, the sequel is the inevitable taxation which hangs like a millstone round the neck of productive labour and enterprise; not merely the increased taxation while war is going on, but the permanent taxation necessary to meet the interest on debt, which in a great war, however successful, mounts up by leaps and bounds. Armies and navies are doubtless necessary to enable us to pursue our peaceful industries and commerce. So far they may even be regarded as an essential part of the great organism of production. But this does not alter the fact that war debts and the taxation they drag in their train all go in support of men and establishments which do not produce commodities which we can utilise in further wealth-production, or with which, as articles of commerce, we can purchase commodities from other lands. A battleship is a marvel of enterprise, design, and labour. But a battleship is not an Atlantic liner which leaves the stocks to become a commercial asset and an instrument for international trade. It needs no argument surely to demonstrate that if, instead of one battleship a nation were so happily situated that it could put on the sea two liners, it would industrially and commercially be the gainer?

Now, of course, Cobden was not so fatuous as to

suppose that we could dispense with an army and a fleet. He was a practical man. But this did not prevent him from seeing, and from saying, that expenditure upon armaments, and still more the employment of them in war, was always a grievous, and beyond certain limits a flagitious, waste of resources. Nay, it was worse than waste at an epoch when, as he read the signs of the times, every industrial nation was called upon to gird its loins, to husband its resources, to increase its production, to push its trade, and to enter that one true fight in which even the Quaker can participate, the fight for markets with its actual, and still more with its coming rivals. Nor did the evil end here. For war, and menaces of war, and even armed peace rear ever anew barriers between nation and nation more than ever estranging, and postpone the day of that peaceful international division of labour under which, as Cobden hoped, the nations were to benefit each other by the freest interchange of commodities. In other words, there were two things which in Cobden's scheme of life could not fuse—Free Trade and War. And as Free Trade had, in his view, become a necessity of national existence, war must be made to cease at peril of national misery and impoverishment.

We must bear these considerations in mind if we are to understand the vituperation which Cobden pours on the doctrine that "Trade follows the flag," and (as the inscription on Chatham's monument has it) "can be made to flourish by war."* The historical question here must not detain us. Let us leave it to the historians to decide whether Trade has or has not, as a matter of fact, followed the flag. It was not with

* Speech, November 23, 1864.

this historical question, nor with Chatham and his policy, that Cobden was primarily concerned. Nor need we speculate as to what line Cobden would have taken had he been confronted with the question, What is to be done should rival powers annex or dominate spheres of influence in order to monopolise markets heretofore neutral? For this was less a matter of practical politics in his day. It is enough to take his vehement assertion that Trade does *not* follow the flag as simply his way of affirming that under the "new dispensation" Trade was becoming so vast and so irresistible a force that it was getting quite beyond the powers of armaments to control it. The attempt to make trade flourish by war, "the policy of the cudgel," was in his eyes not only wicked but futile. Was it not a fact—the sort of fact he gloried in—that the calico-printers of England were undersold under the very guns of Gibraltar?* So powerless were our cannon to open a single market! For if he was convinced of anything, it was that the time was past for "dragooning" the world into taking a single chattel. That was the wrong way of going to work, because it was (apart from all other considerations) the impracticable way. The thing could not be done. And it was impracticable because the nations of the world were (as he thought) discovering that more excellent way—the way of cheapness. It was to this he pinned his faith. It was this that was his flag—the one flag which in the long run Trade was sure to follow.

Hence his passionate and unqualified denunciation of all armed intervention whatever. Convinced that

* "Russia," c. iv. The whole chapter (The Protection of Commerce) is characteristic.

industry and commerce had become the dominating forces in national and international life; convinced that war works havoc with industry and commerce by its deadly effects alike on cheap production and on easy interchange of commodities, he took his stand as an absolute non-interventionist. Not a ship, not a man, will he consent to send; not a farthing will he consent to vote for intervention under any contingencies. No matter what our sympathies may be (and Cobden himself had strong sympathies). No matter though freedom in foreign lands be trampled under foot. No matter though atrocities may outrage the moral sense of the world. The worst that tyrannical governments may do to their subjects, or strong nations to weak ones, will never justify a declaration of war by other intervening nations. For defence a country may do much—turn itself into a camp, if that be necessary—but for all that goes beyond bare defence, it must stand by and wait the event, no matter what it may see, feel, or think.

Cobden's admirers have sometimes denied that he went so far as this. Sir Louis Mallet, *e.g.*, points out that Cobden never positively affirmed that non-intervention by arms must be absolute.* But though he may not have affirmed it in so many words, it is the inference from all he said, wrote, or did.

Now there is, of course, much in this that invites criticism. But, before criticising, it is as well to understand the whole case, seeing that here, as always, Cobden has reasons.

To begin with, let us be clear that Cobdenite non-intervention is not to be confused with a policy of greedy or cynical national selfishness. Cobden was

* See Introduction to "Political Writings" of Cobden.

beyond all gainsaying, cosmopolitan in his outlook. Was he not called "an international man"? The hopes he built upon Free Trade are evidence enough of this. For though it was his prime concern to convince Englishmen that Free Trade was sound business, there are noble passages in which he strikes a loftier note, and touches the more spiritual issues.

"It is because I do believe that the principle of Free Trade is calculated to alter the relations of the world for the better that I bless God I have been allowed to take a prominent part in its advocacy. . . . I have been accused of looking too much at material interests. Nevertheless, I can say that I have taken as large and great a view of the effects of this mighty principle as ever did any man who dreamed over it in his own study. I believe that the physical gain will be the smallest gain to humanity from the success of this principle. I look farther. I see in the Free Trade principle that which shall act on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe—drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race and creed and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace."*

This same cosmopolitan spirit appears in other aspects. It was no part of this non-interventionist's ideal that England should not act upon the world. On the contrary, there were certain things he told his countrymen they could do, and he urged them, with passionate emphasis, to do them. One of these was to paralyse the action of military and militant powers by steadfastly refusing to subscribe to war loans, "loans for the cutting of throats." And though it is not the possible cutting of throats, but the certainty of a bad

* Speech, January 15, 1846.

investment that plays the main part in his arguments, the fact remains that, if only this ingenious plan could have been carried out, England would have intervened to some effect in preventing "the cutting of throats" by cutting the sinews of war.* Another device was the submission of international questions to courts of arbitration—a great cause, in the advocacy of which Cobden must always be remembered honourably as a pioneer.† Still another was international negotiation for a general reduction of armaments, for which every nation, then as now, longed, yet which all nations together, then as now, seemed impotent to achieve.‡

But, above all, there was ever before his eyes another and a more excellent way in which Great Britain could act upon the world. For it was his conviction that, if our country or any country had but the wisdom and the self-control to hold its hands from armed intervention, it would furnish forth to the nations a shining example of national prosperity and happiness—an example which would become only the more effective when other countries came bitterly, like magnified prodigals, to realise what it meant to squander wealth in permanent armaments, to face the periodical ruinous cost of war (no matter in how just an intervention), to heap up debt, to dislocate commerce, to groan under taxation, to sorrow for the dead. It is, therefore, emphatically unjust to the Manchester School to say that in a greedy, narrow, insular selfishness they cared for nothing but their own country. Far from it: they were cosmopolitan. They had a vehement desire to

* Speeches, October 8, 1849, January 18, 1850.

† Speech, June 12, 1849.

‡ Speeches on Peace, 1850-1853.

act upon the world. The question was, How? And their way was the way of peaceful national industrial and commercial example.*

It is further to be remembered that Cobden absolutely repudiated all national responsibility for armed intervention. There are those who think that a country like ours, and indeed that all countries, hold their power, their armed force included, as a trust. It is not in them to believe that a great and powerful nation ought to play the mere spectator in view of movements by which the whole future of millions of the human race in Europe, or beyond Europe, is being for generations to come decided; and least of all if outrage is being done, and freedom trampled in the dust by barbarous or rapacious powers. They believe with Mazzini that, here if anywhere, a nation has a mission. Not so Cobden. He absolutely repudiates such a view. "Do you suppose," he asks, "that the Almighty has given to this country, or to any country, the power and the responsibility of regulating the affairs and remedying the evils of other countries?" † Partly it is that England's hands, and indeed no hands, are clean enough, but partly, and perhaps mainly, the faith (it appears again and again in his pages) that God is over all, and that Providence will right wrongs and check wickedness without our help. We are no more called upon, he cries in one passage which may be taken as typical, "to wrest the attribute of vengeance from the Deity, and deal it forth upon the Northern aggressor, than we are to preserve the peace and good behaviour of Mexico, or to chastise the wickedness of the Ashantees." ‡ It

* "Russia," c. iv. (end).

† November 24, 1863. Speech on American War.

‡ "Russia," c. iv.

is a large assumption. But it stands as a fundamental article of Cobden's creed.

To this trust in Providence we must add a distrust of governments. This was deeply rooted and unwavering. Just as in domestic questions Cobden turned away, with the dogmatic individualism of a *laissez-faire* politician, from the socialistic doctrines of "the fools" (so he called them) who supported Peel and Graham on the Factory Acts, so in the larger world of international relations. He has just as little faith in governmental action here. He would fain banish for ever, as a superstition of "senile Whiggery," all diplomatic meddling with the fancied balance of power, which he denounced as a figment.* This grew upon him; and his misgivings were not to be dispelled by any extension of the franchise and the passage from Whig to Radical government. Radical, and indeed, republican (at least in theory), though he was, even to the extent of endorsing "Vox populi vox Dei," he was not minded to place the people in power without regarding it as the people's highest wisdom not to set their trust in governments. Late in life he defined governments, "as a rule," as "standing conspiracies to rob and bamboozle." "The more I see of the rulers of the world"—so he writes to Bright in his fifty-fifth year—"the less of wisdom or greatness do I find necessary for the government of mankind."† How could a man be expected to believe that "standing conspiracies to rob and bamboozle" were the instruments for working out the purposes of Providence amongst the

* "The theory of a balance of power is a mere chimera—a mere creation of the politician's brain—a phantom . . . a mere conjunction of syllables." ("Russia," c. iii.)

† "Life," ii. p. 241.

nations of the world? "As little intercourse as possible betwixt the *Governments*, as much connection as possible between the *nations* of the world"—this was his ideal.*

It is an even stronger, or at any rate a less convertible, point, that all armed intervention is, as a matter of fact, to the last degree uncertain in its results. "There are two things we confound," says Cobden, in a weighty sentence, "when we talk of intervention in foreign affairs. The intervention is easy enough, but the power to accomplish the object is another thing."† This is not timidity. It is not necessarily defeat he has in view, but the costly unsatisfying half-success, which makes so many nations sorrowfully wise after the event.

Finally, against this doubtful gain there is to be set what is never doubtful, the cost—the cost which, to this prosaic and practical man, with his homely ideal of industrious comfort and peaceful citizenship, resolved all the pomp, circumstance, heroism, and chivalry of war into nothing other than, in Bentham's phrase, "mischief on the largest scale."‡ Nor were his protests limited to war. They were as strong against the panics and surprises that load the nations with the burdens of armed peace—that costly armed peace which, in the words of Gambetta, threatens to reduce the peoples of Europe "to beg at the gates of the barracks." Not the most hostile critic can deny that, at any rate, Cobden's writings and speeches are a manual on the voracity not only of war but of armed peace.§ "In the name of every artisan in the kingdom

* "Russia," c. iii. (end).

† Speech, November 24, 1863.

‡ Speech, June 12, 1849.

§ In "The Third Panic" Cobden quotes Bastiat: "The ogre, war, costs as much for his digestion as for his meals."

to whom war would bring the tidings once more of suffering and despair; in the behalf of the peasantry of these islands to whom the first cannon would sound the knell of privation and death; on the part of the capitalists, merchants, manufacturers, and traders who can reap no other fruits from hostilities but bankruptcy and ruin: in a word, for the sake of the vital interests of these and all other classes of the community, we solemnly protest against Great Britain being plunged into war with Russia or any other country on behalf of Turkey.”*

All this is forcible; and, indeed, it is not only so forcible, but in many respects so convincing that it becomes the more important to be on one’s guard against certain assumptions and fallacies with which these arguments are interwoven.

For, if it be not a figure of rhetoric, it is an assumption, and nothing else, that non-intervention is part of the Divine scheme of things. Where, if not in history, are the Divine purposes and methods with nations to be read? And who can deny that in the world, as history reveals it, war has been so inextricably interwoven with the course of events and with what we usually call progress, that he who makes so bold as to say that the armed struggles of nations are no part of the Divine plan, leaves us wondering and in the dark as to what this Divine plan would have achieved had battles never been fought or won? We cannot say: we do not know. It was an article of Cobden’s faith that the virtues in the long run always go with strength

* “Russia,” c. iv. (written in 1836).

and the vices with weakness.* One hopes so. But if this conviction is to rest on the teaching of historical fact, the sifting process and the results have been wrought out by the energies of war as well as by the energies of peace. Not that we are called upon to contradict Cobden here. This would but substitute two dogmatisms for one. Enough to lodge a protest that this whole question as to the methods of Providence in history is too vast, too perplexing, too metaphysical to be settled by assumptions. Cobden is not entitled to claim without more proof than he furnishes that Providence is on the side of non-intervention, any more than those of a different way of thinking are entitled, without proof, to assume that Providence takes the side of the strongest battalions.

Nor can one accept the fallacy—for it is nothing else—that “the intercourse between communities is nothing more than the intercourse of individuals in the aggregate”; and, therefore, to be conducted on the same peaceful principles.† The analogy does not hold. Within the “barriers” of the nation we can leave the free competition of man with man, or trade with trade, or party with party, to pass into pitch of utmost tension, only because we can rest assured that behind all this there is a strong and stable government which can prevent competitions and rivalries from issuing in civil strife. But this moderating and restraining power is just what we look for in vain when we pass to the relations between nation and nation. International law no doubt exists, but what are its sanctions? There

* Speech, November 24, 1863. “No; it is certain that in this world the virtues and the forces go together, and the vices and the weaknesses are inseparable.”

† Speech, June 12, 1849. Foreign Policy.

is a "European concert"—hesitating in its deliverances and slow in its actions. There are treaties and courts of arbitration, though, as Cobden was the foremost to urge, they are never to be entrusted with any powers of enforcing their deliverances. Who will contend that all these put together can exercise upon nations, especially strong ones, more than a shadow of the control and restraint exercised over individuals by the law of the land of which they are citizens? The fallacy is at its height in certain remarks upon national cowardice. "If," Cobden argues, "that which constitutes cowardice in individuals, viz., the taking of undue and excessive precautions against danger merits the same designation when practised by communities—then England certainly must rank as the greatest poltroon among nations."* This may be well as a rhetorical protest against panics repeatedly proved groundless. But if it be meant as a serious attempt to place on the same footing the precautions which one nation takes against others, and the timidity which, in a law-abiding country, arms private houses with burglar alarms and loaded revolvers, the analogy is of the flimsiest. For, of course, the unsuspecting fearlessness of men towards each other in a civilised society, goes with the knowledge that, even if advantage be taken of this confidence, there is yet an iron limit which arrests all encroachment on security of person or property. This is of the rudiments of civil freedom. But, of course, this immunity from aggression is unfortunately just what one nation can *not* count upon as against other nations, so long as there is no supreme coercive authority above all nations to

* "Russia," c. iv.

step in with a "Thus far and no further," and to proceed to inflict condign chastisement upon the aggressor.

Now it would be absurd to say that Cobden was blind to such considerations. On the contrary, he showed himself alive to the fact that, in the existing economy of civilisation, a nation must stand prepared, if need be, to defend its national existence by force of arms. He did this when he separated himself decisively from the apostles of peace at any price.* He did it, in a manner sufficiently emphatic, when he declared that rather than suffer France to equalise her ships of war with ours he would vote £100,000,000 to the navy estimates.† But then he did this wholly in the interests of national defence. Nor was there ever the slightest wavering in his policy that, under all contingencies, all other nations or tribes must be left to defend themselves, or, should it please them, to make havoc of one another.

It is here one finds it hard to repress the simple question, what would be likely to happen were a great power like the British Empire to act as Cobden would, all his life, have wished? What would happen if it were to renounce, in the eye of the world, the intention of so much as lifting a finger unless it were itself attacked, and to declare that, come what might, it would limit itself to the influence of peace-pursuing example? Two results, at any rate. Such tidings would in some quarters sound like the knell of doom. It would be so in small and weak countries with powerful and aggressive neighbours, in rich countries feebly governed and ill-defended, in uncivilised races whose lands are coveted by civilised colonisers, in a

* January 27, 1853.

† Speech, June 26, 1861.

word, in the possible victims of ambition over the civilised and uncivilised world. On the other hand there would be other ears on which the tidings would fall with a different sound; on the ears of the ambitious master of legions, or of great powers covetous for colonies or spheres of influence, or of unscrupulous fomenters of insurrection or ruthless stampers-out of insurrection, or of fanatical hordes such as in our own day have devastated the Soudan. To such as these—and who will deny that they exist?—what could be more welcome than the acceptance of Cobdenite principles by such great powers as might come between them and their malign ends. Swift would be their perception that, by every power converted to the gospel of non-intervention, they would have so much the freer hand for the indulgence of their ambitions and rapacities. Is it by the peaceful example of great powers that such as these are to be restrained, or by refusal to subscribe to “loans for the cutting of throats” (even were this practicable), or by Courts of Arbitration which announce their intention of never enforcing their findings, or by negotiations for disarmament? Can we believe—much as we might wish to do so—that anything avails to stop them short of the armed hostility, actual or threatened, of precisely those powers which, if they followed Cobden’s advice, would refuse to intervene at all? This is the standing difficulty of a doctrine of non-intervention. Admirably fitted to convert some nations whose intervention, in the interests of justice and freedom, is most to be desired, it is thereby only too likely to encourage the intervention, for ends not so laudable, of those other nations or tribes, whose intervention is not to be desired at all. In other words, it would neutralise the action

of those who, being amenable to argument, seem least in need of being bidden to hold their hand ; and those who need to be withheld to the face it would leave, by removal of checks upon their action, to work their will with the destinies of peoples and the course of civilisation. Nor can any man feel confident that such a policy, even were it desirable, can be seriously said to be practicable. The sympathies of a nation are not bounded by the barriers of its own life and interests, and times are apt to come when these sympathies, racial, religious, political, humanitarian, become so passionate that they cannot be restrained. If this be the fact, it is part of all wise statesmanship to make provision for such a contingency. Little to be envied is that country, which should adopt a Cobdenite policy only to find itself swept along on a wave of democratic passion, into an armed intervention for which it was all unready.

Nor is the Manchester School to be acquitted here of unconsciously playing a part which is something of an irony upon its own doctrine. For if it has become difficult for Englishmen to stand by and passively look on at what they consider tyranny and atrocity in other lands, one reason for this is that the moving words of Cobden and Bright have helped to make them lovers of freedom. "It is the jealous, patriotic, unselfish love of this 'freedom,'" says Cobden, "impelling the whole community to rush to the legal rescue of the meanest pauper, if his character or personal liberties be infringed by those in power that distinguishes us from all European countries."* Yet this is just the leaven which makes it difficult to listen to such tributes to freedom

* Letter to Rev. ——, January, 1853.

and then to play no more than the spectator's part in struggles which, though they may be beyond our frontiers, are still struggles for freedom, begotten of the words of our own orators and statesmen. Nor need a great nation be stayed from intervention by any or all of those doubts that Cobden throws upon its fitness for the task. If, as he says of England, its record is not clean enough, the answer is not denial but the admission that, if indeed it be so, then there is no better way of redeeming even the uncleanest of records than by resolute intervention and sacrifice in a righteous cause. And when he argues that no nation is wise enough to be trusted to act, it is not necessary to hold a brief for the wisdom of governments. Enough that the intervention of a nation in foreign affairs may be justified, not so much by any claim it can advance to perfect wisdom as by a well-grounded conviction of the un-wisdom of its intervening neighbours or rivals. It is certainly no part of human wisdom to hold its hands, either at home or abroad, till it can find perfect instruments.

Nor can it be said, looking at the matter broadly, that since Cobden's day, the conditions have made his policy easier of adoption. In some respects, perhaps, they have. The public conscience is more disposed to condemn war—at any rate in the abstract. Some countries, again (our own surely) seem to have become greatly more sensitive to sacrifice of human life. All countries, it is safe to say, have come more clearly to realise the cost of war, partly for the simple reason that it has become infinitely more costly, but partly also (one may hope) from the diffusion of sounder economic ideas. The interests that suffer from war have also, under democracy, grown larger and

more articulate. Nor can it be doubted that Arbitration has made some, though not perhaps marked or rapid progress. At least, civilised peoples are coming to know one another more, and to hate one another less. Yet it may be feared there are influences—not evil influences only by any means—which tend in the contrary direction, and one of these is the growth, alike in fact and idea, of nationality.

In so far as nations tend to expand into great Empires this may ultimately make for Peace. The *pax Romana* was the other side of the imperial system of conquering Rome: similarly there is a *pax Britannica* not to be broken within our Empire. Assured peace within great Empires on which the sun never sets is an instalment towards universal peace (if such a thing be possible) not to be despised. But apart from this, and certainly in that period when empires are actively in the making, who will say that the spirit of nationality makes for peace? For it seems to be axiomatic with the nations of the world that their own unimpaired existence, and in the case especially of strong nations the realisation of their ideals, is essential to civilisation. This appears to be the creed on which they act. And not unnaturally. For under the existing political system, in which there is no higher authority to do justice as between nation and nation, each nation is driven to feel that the trust immediately committed to it is its own self-preservation and development. The heritage of our civil and political liberty so hardly won; our altars and hearths; our language, traditions and ideals; our colonising instincts; our imperial destinies—for these the citizen is more immediately responsible. These things have, so to say, the first charge on his thoughts and energies. And though there is nothing

in this that need prevent the obliteration of that international ignorance, suspicion and hatred, which still persist even between highly civilised powers, there remains a risk—the risk that the intense patriotic devotion to a man's own country, which seems ready to make almost any sacrifice for the nation, will bring the citizens of diverse countries, in all honesty, to do something more than justice to their own claims and aspirations, and something less than justice to the aspirations of their neighbours; thereby paving the way for those dire collisions of clashing interests and irreconcilable ideals out of which comes the sanguinary arbitrament of war. It is a vast assumption—one could wish it were a demonstrated truth—that the real interests of all nations are in harmony.* It is still but an aspiration—one could wish it were a true prophecy—that what, under "that just prejudice men call their country," the nations severally believe to be their interests will not come, only too often, into armed collision.

This risk is enhanced by the direction which national (or imperial) aspirations have recently taken. For that victorious industrial and commercial development, in which Cobden saw the presage of peace, has stimulated powerfully the appetite for colonial expansion and the rush for spheres of influence. And when the appropriation of the sphere of influence is wedded to the monopolising spirit of protection, who can doubt that it carries in it the seeds of many an international quarrel? Cobden himself was ready to admit that armaments were necessary for defence. But a nation of manufacturers and mechanics, dependent for their

* An assumption which Cobden made: . . . "the honest interests of my country, which, I believe, with God's blessing, are the interests of all mankind" (Speech, October 25, 1862. Foreign Policy).

bread upon their success in foreign markets, may be seriously menaced by other things besides invasion of its shores, or overt attacks upon its colonies and dependencies, or armed aggression on its mercantile marine. The diplomacy of rival and sometimes hostile powers, especially if those powers can reckon upon an attitude of non-intervention, may close markets finally over vast and populous areas. Is nothing to be done then but to try to argue such monopolists into free trade policy?

Nor is it a little thing that Cobden asks of the citizens of any of the great powers of the world when he invites them to become non-interventionists. He invites them, no matter how strong their cosmopolitan sympathies may be, to renounce once for all the claim that their country should give expression to these sympathies by either act or threat of war.

It would be rash to say that in asking nothing less than this he was unreasonable. It is at any rate certain that the citizens of a State after Cobden's own heart would escape from much. They would escape the certain cost and the costly uncertainties of war. They would escape the risk of drawing the sword in an unjust, or hopeless, or trivial cause. They would escape the responsibilities of provoking counter-intervention. Not least they would escape participation in those horrors on which it is needless to dilate, and in which even the justest of wars stands panoplied. But it would not be all gain. For these immunities they would have to pay a price. The day would come—it would be certain to come some time—when they would be face to face with the fact that their country had it in its power to intervene with decisive effect in some cause that enlisted their deepest political sym-

pathies, while yet there was nothing for it left but to play the rôle of the spectator—spectator possibly of armed interventions, by which the fate of nations and even the future of continents was being determined in defiance of all their hopes and aspirations. It is not easy to unite in one ideal of citizenship those cosmopolitan sympathies and aspirations of which Cobden himself was a prophet, and that refusal to draw the sword save for defence alone, which to writers like Mazzini has seemed nothing less than an abdication of cosmopolitan duty.

Cobden's political creed has drawn upon itself vehement and varied attack. Soldiers have resented (and surely not without reason) his bitter disparagement of a great profession, and scholars his Philistine scoffs at the Ilissus. In his glorification of the magnitude of modern material interests he was grossly ignorant, or forgetful, that the tiny glorious Athenian State was the cradle of civic and political virtue. Imperialists have taxed him, not unjustly, with the belittlement of colonies and dependencies and an indifference to "Greater Britain." And men of more spiritual and ethical fibre, such as Carlyle and Ruskin, have denounced his ideal as "a calico millennium." The result is that there has grown up in many minds the picture of Cobden as a limited man, a political huckster, to whom Trade was all in all. It is no true picture of the man. No careful reader of his *Speeches* and *Pamphlets* can accept it, and still less can any student of his *Life*. For though his talk was of trade and tariffs, of wages, profits, rents, loans, debts, budgets, this was in large measure the result of the fact that it fell to him to lead in the free-trade movement. It is easy to see that there was room

in his soul for much besides the things which were perforce most upon his lips. We have seen this already in his own avowals of the ends that upheld him in the free-trade struggle. But we can see it elsewhere, often in unexpected ways. Who was it, in that vacant half-hour at Shrewsbury, sighed for the knowledge of mullions and architraves that had been denied him? Who was it laughed at the Paisley manufacturer who wished to exploit the classic Doon for water-power? Who was it who never ceased to yearn for the peace and simplicity of country life? Who was it stirred the heart by his tribute to the heroism of the Quakers who held life light amidst the horrors of the Irish famine?* Who was it declared that "had he the casting of the rôle of all the actors on this world's stage, he would not suffer a Cotton Mill or manufactory to have a place in it"?†

Nor did he fail to feel, as few men of affairs have felt, the spiritual price that often has to be paid for strenuous public service. "Here I am," he writes from Wales, when the battle of Free Trade had been fought, "in one day from Manchester, to the loveliest valley out of Paradise. Ten years ago, before I was an agitator, I spent a day or two in this house. Comparing my sensations now with those I then experienced, I feel how much I have lost in winning public fame."‡ For Cobden's ideal of English citizenship was not exhausted in that comfortable, prosperous abundance which he believed a policy of Free Trade and Peace would certainly bring. He has told us so himself. "There are many things besides Free Trade to be done before this country is a fit place to live in."

* Letter to Rev. ——, January, 1853. Perhaps the most eloquent passage in Cobden's writings.

† "England, Ireland and America," part iii. ‡ "Life," i. p. 408.

THOMAS CARLYLE

THE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC RADICALISM OF THOMAS CARLYLE

(The references are to the People's Edition of Carlyle's Works.)

CARLYLE'S verdict upon J. S. Mill was that he was "too fond of demonstrating everything," and, so far at least as the form of his own thought is concerned, he is at peculiar pains not to fall into the same extreme. The logic of the schools, "rushlight logic," "closet logic," "vulgar logic," finds little favour in his eyes—except as a target for objurgations. "'Cogito, ergo sum,' 'Alas! poor Cogitator that will take us but a little way,'" it is so he blasphemers the father of constructive idealism. This runs throughout. In Emerson's phrase, he "does not love to spin the ostentatious continuity." So little does he love it that most of his readers, we suspect, though they recognise the splendour and force of passages, have but an imperfect notion of the connection of the whole. And so, when friendly, they are content to take Carlyle as a man of intuitions—intuitions as abrupt and inconsecutive as those of the Hebrew prophets to whom, and not without justification, they are wont to liken him; and, when un-friendly, they are not without a leaning towards that critic of *The Sun* who wrote down "Sartor Resartus" as "a heap of clotted nonsense."

This difficulty of interpretation meets us when we turn to his politics. For at first sight his politics puzzle. He is not Tory, nor Whig, nor Radical (in the ordinary sense of the word), except indeed in so far as he may be made to fill office admirably in all of these parties as "Devil's advocate." Every student of his life and writings must know that he spent many an hour for many a year in flinging projectiles, of which he had an unlimited store, with impartially good aim at all parties in the State. The "Scavenger Age" he once called the nineteenth century. *Cujus pars magna.*

It is to the Whigs perhaps that he is least respectful. He hated their half-hearted *via media*. He despised them both for their lack of foundations, and even more perhaps for the fact that they did not seem to miss them. He was thorough; they were "the grand dilettanti." "There is more hope of an atheist Utilitarian," he once broke out in his Diary, "of a superstitious ultra-Tory than of such a lukewarm withered mongrel." It is true that, as years went on, his estimates softened. The titular aristocracy, whig or other, was not quite anathema maranatha. There stands a sentence in which, late in life, he records his deliberate verdict that "from plebs to princeps there was still no class among us intrinsically so valuable and recommendable."* And yet even this, strong as the words are, is not much better than a commutation of the sentence passed in earlier years. The writer of the epitaph upon that "worthy nobleman," the Count

* "And, indeed, in spite of lamentable exceptions too visible all round, my vote would still be, that from plebs," &c. ("Shooting Niagara," 1867. See "Miscellaneous Essays," vii. p. 213).

von Zähdarm,* had some amends to make to the "double-barrelled," "game-preserving," "corn-lawing" aristocracy of "Chartism" and "Past and Present." Carlyle was all his life a believer in aristocracy, but, as happens sometimes with other believers in aristocracy, like Plato, Burke and Coleridge, his tributes to the natural aristocracies of insight and of worth are the bitterest of satires upon the aristocracy of titles, pedigrees, broad acres, sport and luxury.

And yet it is not to be forgotten that Carlyle is severely impartial. For one must hasten to add that, if whigs and tories pleased him not, neither did radicals. If the aristocratic landlords, whom he called upon in "Sartor Resartus" to be pioneers of emigration, were "preserving their game," what were the radicals doing? They were busy "ballot-boxing on the graves of heroic ancestors," or sending masters of tongue-fence to the national Palaver, or shouting for liberty—to leap over precipices, or jubilantly preparing to "shoot Niagara."

Even in face of this, however, and of much else in the same strain, radicals are not left without their consolations. For it must be consolation of a kind to know that, if their shrift be short, they receive it at the hands of one who is probably a greater radical than themselves. For beyond a doubt Carlyle is a radical of the first magnitude. What other name can fit the preacher of the doctrine, as it stands written in "Sartor Resartus," that all ranks, dignities, institutions,

* "Qui dum sub luna agebat
Quinque mille perdices
Plumbo confecit," &c.

With the fitting close—

"Nunc a labore requiescentem
Opera sequuntur."

creeds, are but the clothes, often threadbare enough, wherewith the human spirit patches its nakedness and masquerades in the world's eye. The entire volume is one prolonged cry of "Old Clothes." That chapter, "The World out of Clothes," with its levelling disillusionments, is surely Sansculottism of an advanced type! And when was the natural equality of men more picturesquely set forth than in those few pages on "Adamitism"? "Speculative radical" is indeed his own epithet for *Teufelsdröckh*, and "spiritual radicalism" for his doctrine. Both phrases fit Carlyle himself.

Similarly in regions less visionary and less speculative. Carlyle drank in radicalism in his father's cottage. He was bred on a countryside where radical tradition was in the blood. The religious faith of his early years was emphatically one which knew no respect of persons. By hearsay, by observation which few things escaped, by personal experience, he was familiar with the struggles and the worth of the poor. With humble life he had to the end of his days a deep and understanding sympathy. And when in "Chartism" (1839), and "Past and Present" (1843), he directly attacked political questions, his utterance is radical to the roots. It is radical in the lurid exposition of "The Condition of England Question," and radical in its fiery and menacing demand that something must be done, and done quickly. All Carlyle's flouts and flings, all his gibes and scoffs (and their name is legion) at the political radicals of his day must not be suffered to hide the fact that to the genius that winged his words he united a practical insight that made him the passionate advocate of popular causes, since familiar enough, far in advance of his day. One need but

name Poor-law reform, Corn-law reform, Factory Acts, Land-law reform, not to speak of Public Health and Emigration. "It is long years," he writes to Emerson of the Revolution of 1848, "since I felt any such deep-seated satisfaction at a public event." * And even that wild, unbridled, derisive outburst, which for ever divided him from the ordinary political radicals, the "Latter Day Pamphlets," what is it but one of the most vehement pleas ever penned for administrative reform? Nor is it simply that he dealt with these things. Many others did that. His distinction was to deal with them after such a fashion, with humour, pathos, paradox, satire, invective, eloquence, as to burn them into the mind of his generation. It is for this reason that he is not only a radical, but the father of radicals. How many radicals, and others, one may wonder, have found their inspiration in the trumpet-calls of "Past and Present," or even in that single, short, concentrated, explosive chapter, "Helotage," in the volcanic page of "Sartor Resartus"?

Yet if we claim Carlyle for radicalism—and nothing else is possible—it is very certain that his is not the radicalism we know—not that of Bentham or Mill or Bright or Cobden or Mazzini or Green. For it is radicalism in disbelief, derision, and denunciation of democracy. One finds him writing to Emerson that he was much struck with Plato and his notions about democracy.† Small wonder. For since Plato wrote the

* "Showing once again," he adds, "that the righteous Gods do yet live and reign" ("Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson," ii. p. 163).

† "Correspondence with Emerson," ii. p. 222. "I was much struck with Plato, last year, and his notions about Democracy: mere Latter-Day Pamphlet . . . refined into empyrean radiance and lightning of the gods."

eighth book of the *Republic* there has been no such satirist of democracy as this "spiritual radical."

Now, of course, Carlyle never dreamed of denying that Democracy was a fact. His eyes were open to the signs of the times, and he saw that it had come. "The tramp of its million feet," he declares, "is in all our streets and thoroughfares." Nor did he doubt that it would run its course. As little did he dispute that it had its uses. The author of "*The French Revolution*" knew well its powers to cleanse and destroy. It was especially valuable as an instrument for depositing shams and quacks. "In all this wild revolutionary work," he once said, "from Protestantism downwards, I see the blessedest result preparing itself." So in his view of democratic theories. He was no lover of Benthamism (as we shall see), but he did not fail to discern the possibilities of root and branch work that it carried within it.* But there his appreciation stopped. What remains for democracy at his hands can only be described as a prolonged commination service.

This is the more interesting because there is so much in Carlyle's thought that might seem to make for thorough-going democracy. For Carlyle is on many points in singular agreement with his democratic friend Mazzini. Like that apostle of the religion of democracy, he believes in the divinity of the individual man. "Through every living soul," so run his own words, "the glory of a present God still beams." He is emphatic here. The veriest human scarecrow, he assures us, holds his title of manhood from the

* "*Sartor Resartus*," bk. iii. c. v. "Or, in plain words, that these men, Liberals, Utilitarians, or whatsoever they are called, will ultimately carry their point, and dissever and destroy most existing institutions of Society, seems a thing which has some time ago ceased to be doubtful."

Maker direct. The dullest clodpole, the haughtiest featherhead has that divine spark in him which constrains him to follow the leader of men, the "hero," when he sees him. None of all the writers of democracy has ever spoken as he has of "the peasant saint," or done more to dignify the toils obscure of honest poverty. Not even Burns. But there he parts company. When Mazzini goes on to argue, and surely not without a presumption in his favour, that if men are thus in very truth the children of God, they must be trusted to take their political destinies into their own hands and work out their own political salvation, he will have none of it. And so, as the years went on, and he saw English democracy running its course, he has nothing left to offer it but jeers ever more derisive at "the 27,000,000 gods of the gallery," scoffs ever more embittered at "horse-hood" and "dog-hood" suffrage, and even—let the worst be said—execrations upon what he once called "the rotten multitudinous canaille."* The truth here is exactly as Mazzini puts it in his criticism. Carlyle believes in God; he believes also in the worth of the individual man however humble and homely; what he does not believe in, what he abhors and distrusts for evermore is the Collective Will. "God and the individual man—Mr. Carlyle sees no other object in the world," so run Mazzini's words.†

Carlyle's indictment of democratic radicalism is on the face of it highly rhetorical. He could not write

* "Oh, shall not victory at last be to the handful of brave; in spite of the rotten multitudinous canaille, who seem to inherit all the world and its forces and steel-weapons and culinary and stage properties? Courage, and be true to one another" ("Reminiscences," ii. p. 170).

† Mazzini's Writings, iv. p. 80. "The genius and tendency of the writings of Thomas Carlyle." Smith, Elder & Co. 1890.

without rhetoric. But behind the rhetoric there are reasons. "Yes, it would be rash to say that they have no reasons"—these were among his latest words. And for whomsoever they were meant,* they certainly apply to himself. He has usually reasons for even his most rhetorical outbursts. And in the present instance he leaves us in no doubt as to what his reasons were.

One reason was that he realised with a penetrating insight the depth and difficulty of the problems. He used to laugh sardonically at some of the questions that agitated politicians, "Game Laws, Usury Laws, African Blacks, Hill Coolies, Smithfield Cattle, and Dog-carts." And even when the country was convulsed over the first Reform Bill, he had an intuition that the real questions lay deeper than merely political reforms could touch. "It never smokes but there is fire" was the motto he chose for his "Chartism." For as he looked out, in the thirties, first from the "Dunscore Patmos" of Craigenputtock and afterwards from his retreat in Chelsea, it was on a spectacle of deep-seated social disorganisation. It was an England of full purses and full poor-houses, of "over-production" when clothes could not find backs, and backs could not find clothes to cover them, where every new machine was welcomed, and that "cunningest of all machines" a man was superfluous, where there was endless work to be done, and where willing workers sought in vain for work to do. It was an England, in short, ill-fed, ill-housed, discontented, given over to smashing of machinery and rick-burning and mutinous Chartist agitation. Carlyle saw this, and felt it. "Call ye that

* Cf. Froude, "Life in London," ii. p. 469; and Wilson's "Mr. Froude and Carlyle," p. 321.

a Society," he cries, "where there is no longer any Social Idea extant; not so much as the idea of a Common Home, but only of a common over-crowded Lodging-house? Where each isolated, regardless of his neighbour, turned against his neighbour, clutches what he can get, and cries 'Mine,' and calls it Peace because in the cut-purse and cut-throat Scramble no steel knives but only a far cunniner sort can be employed."* This was "the Condition of England Question" as Carlyle raised it, and he could not believe that democratic radicalism was equal to its solution. It was unequal to the work that had to be done. Powerful to destroy, it was impotent to reconstruct. Admirable as a besom to sweep the world of simulacra, reorganisation was beyond it. Forceable enough for wresting tools from the hands that could not use them, it was feeble for putting them into hands that could. He never seems to have had much faith in it at any time, and after the death of Peel, the one contemporary statesman in whom he had some confidence, his disbelief in political methods steadily grew upon him, till the note that was struck in "Latter Day Pamphlets," in 1850, found its sequel (in 1867) in the wild whirling, derisive invective of "Shooting Niagara." But he had reasons. All along his faith in collective wisdom was of the slenderest. And one can easily see why. For it was part of the doctrine of Unconsciousness, as given to the world in the pregnant early essay on "Characteristics," that even the greatest actors on the world's stage are swept along by ideas of which they are but imperfectly conscious. It was always his conviction that the forces of life lie deeper than the plummet of consciousness can

* "Sartor Resartus," bk. iii. c. v.

sound. The ideas that master men are greater than the ideas men master. Some of the most picturesque effects in all his writings are those in which he loves to describe how even intellectual leaders in the very hour of their fancied enlightenment are being precipitated towards ends they wot not of. Was it not so with the French salons before the revolution, in love with new ideas, and all unconscious of the blood-boltered Nemesis that was lying in ambush for them? Was it not so with the revolutionary leaders, filled with the latest lights of *Encyclopædism*, and so soon to be devoured by the spectre of Anarchy which they had themselves unchained? Was it not so with the French Noblesse who scoffed at the theories of "The Social Contract," and whose "skins were used to bind the second edition of that work?" If these things were done in the green tree, what was likely to be done in the dry should power pass into the hands of those whom even Mill designated "the collective mediocrity" and "common uncultivated herd?" "On the whole," so runs one of many similar reflections in "The French Revolution," "how unknown is a man to himself, or a Public Body of men to itself? *Æsop's* fly on the chariot wheel exclaiming, 'What a dust I do raise!'"* It needed only that this gospel of The Unconscious, to which even genius must bow, should join hands with a low and not seldom a contemptuous and cynic estimate of popular intelligence, and we have all the elements for that scornful belittlement of popularly-elected Parliaments which grew upon Carlyle *pari passu* with the growth of democratic power. Fatuity could no further go than to suppose that an

* "French Revolution," ii. p. 171.

electorate "mostly fools" could by the panacea of ballot-boxes find their way where even "illuminati" had stumbled and fallen, or solve problems which called for nothing less than the insight and valour of the rare *heaven-elected* leader of men.

Nor is any one likely to deny that on one point Carlyle was here indubitably right. The problems were difficult. They were deeper far than the politicians imagined. It is easy now to see that the reforms of 1832 and the years that immediately followed could not fulfil the democratic hopes that were built upon them. Hence disillusioning and embitterment. Hence Chartism. Hence the cry for a new, and still again a new Reform Bill. Hence, in due season, the advent of Socialism. Let justice be done to Carlyle here. He saw with the clearest eyes, as Mill likewise saw and as the politicians did not see, that the problems were deeper, more stubborn, more formidable than political reform could solve. They were social questions. This is what Carlyle saw. He saw it, and he said it when, brushing politics aside, he declared that the real question of the day, and he might have added of many a day to come, was "The Condition of England Question."

It is quite another matter, however, when he went on to revile democracy as impotent, or, as he called it, "paralytic." One must not, to be sure, say dogmatically that he was wrong. Democracy is still upon its trial. Yet it is not premature to suggest that there are some respects in which the damning verdict is, to say the least, unconvincing. Thus, it lies on the surface that in his unrelieved diatribes, Carlyle ignores the possibility that a democracy can learn its business. We have seen that the educative influence of democratic institutions was the sheet-anchor of Mill's

optimism.* It is absolutely nothing to Carlyle. He believed, indeed, in popular education. He passionately pled for it. But it did not come into his horizon, as it did into that of Mill, that there is a civic education that comes of the free citizen's contact with affairs. This is the most glaring gap in Carlyle's politics. He does not know how to value the civic spirit. If he turns his eyes on citizenship at all, it is only to see the evil incidents—the shibboleths, the palaver, the stump-oratory, the *schwärmerei*, the ignorance, the levity, the recklessness. The evils need not be denied, Mill saw them. And yet Mill was convinced—and both Mazzini and Green (as we shall see) shared the conviction—that it is of the essence of all sound national life, not only that the State should count on the subject's loyalty, but that the citizen should find his life, as he can never find it in the circumscribed round of private interests, in and through the duties which are also the responsibilities of civic status. Carlyle, to be sure, believed that the individual man, be he never so lowly, was capable of much, of nothing less, indeed, than of "writing on the eternal skies the record of a heroic life." It is his limitation that he seems to shut his eyes to the fact that, far short of the heroic life and nearer hand, lies what Green was wont to call "the life of the good neighbour and honest citizen."

Similarly, with these flouts and flings at democratic ignorance. It is easy to emphasise the complex difficulty of political and social problems; to point to the ignorance of the mob and to draw the obvious inference. It was the way of Lowe when he fought against the extension of the franchise, as it was the

* See above, p. 68.

way of Maine when he deplored that the franchise had been extended.* It is the way of all the critics of democratic government. First they magnify political questions as enough to perplex the wits of experts. Then they proceed to ask if "roughs and clowns" are likely to find solutions. Carlyle's indictment is substantially the same, except that in the rich rhetoric of his onslaught he leaves all other critics far behind.

The issue as thus stated is, however, all too easy. The real issue involves certain further considerations which, in barest justice to democracy, are not to be forgotten. One of them is the fact, sufficiently familiar, that political questions come before the democratic electorate in a vastly simplified form. When Gladstone was arguing the case for extension of the franchise as against the unbelieving intellectualism of Lowe he laid it down as axiomatic that "the people must be passive." This, he said, was "written with a pen of iron on the rock of human destiny."† He did not mean, of course, that the people had nothing left them to do, but only that they were not called upon to play their decisive part till by much discussion elsewhere, in press, platform, parliament, private life, the questions *sub judice* had been threshed out and reduced to their broad issues. Nothing can be more evident than that the Tariff problem or an Agricultural Holdings Bill or a project for graduated Taxation, if these be taken in all their baffling intricacies and far-reaching consequences, pass far

* See the peculiarly interesting controversy between Lowe and Gladstone upon the County Franchise in Gladstone's "Gleanings of Past Years," vol. i. cc. v. vi. vii. See also Maine's "Popular Government," e.g. p. 78, 88 *et seq.*

† The *Nineteenth Century* for July 1878. See Gladstone's "Gleanings," as cited above.

beyond the mental compass of the average elector. Even the chosen representative has before now been beholden to the expert in one and all of them. And if the matter ended there, there would be nothing left for democracy but to humble itself under the Carlylian rod. If it does not, if it still clings to the claim to manage its own affairs, it is on the comparatively modest ground that the average man can be trusted to cast an honest and sensible vote after many a voice and many a pen have for many a day been labouring to make the broad issues level to his comprehension. Nor is this an unreasonable expectation. It is not unreasonable because the qualities to be looked for in an electorate are far from being purely intellectual. In any great community it must always happen that the members of the diverse ranks, classes, and conditions bring with them to the work of self-government their own characteristic virtues, and defects. They are severally placed in positions of advantage, and of disadvantage. Carlyle alas! sees only, and all too clearly, the disadvantages and the defects. Who will venture to hold a brief for the learned class when he recalls the "Dryasdusts" of the Carlylian pillory? Or for the nobility when he remembers the "graceful idleness" of Mayfair diversified by "the sweat of Melton-Mowbray"? Or for the plutocracy when his thoughts run to the whole broadsides delivered against cash-nexus and "Midas-eared Mammonism." Or for the plebs when he resuscitates —those epithets we have seen? But it is not upon defects and disadvantages that questions of suffrage turn. If this were so, the whole world might well be disfranchised. The one point worth discussing is whether beneath the defects, which need not be dis-

puted, there can not be found in the members of *all classes* in the State those positive qualities that make the citizen.

These qualities are not intellectual merely; nor is it difficult to specify what they are. One is the ability to set sufficient value upon the broad public ends upon which all political effort is directed, and among these the very ends to which Carlyle himself has so opened the eyes of his countrymen that they cannot again be closed. One has but to think of personal independence, tools to the man who can use them and wages to the man who can earn them, good sanitation, accessible education, the maintenance of law and order, an efficient public service, national defence—these are the very ends which Carlyle proclaimed upon the housetops; and not in vain, because in truth they are ends that stare even the average man in the face and cross his life and his interests in manifold inevitable ways. A second quality, and it goes closely with the first, is sufficient superiority to selfish and (to use Bentham's favourite term) "sinister" interests. But, then, these "sinister" interests are not the peculiar bane of a democratic electorate. They are the bane of all classes in the State, and they are not least the bane, as Bentham would remind us, of those classes who are peculiarly tempted towards them by social privilege and political monopoly. Still another quality is that experience of the transaction of public business which, as we have seen, filled so large a place in the educational outlook of Mill, and which comes of actual contact with the affairs of workshop, friendly society, trades-union, co-operative association, political organisation, not less surely than it comes in other walks of life. Lastly, and above all else important,

there is that sagacity, shrewdness, common sense (call it what we may) which is the cardinal quality of the practical man in all conditions of life. The critic of human nature may say it is none too common. Carlyle, for one, thought it was none too common in any social stratum. Least of all is he disposed to admit its presence in the twenty-seven millions "mostly fools." Yet even Carlyle tells us it may be found under the peasant's roof; nor in his humorous and satirical, yet not unkindly estimate of the English character * does he fail to credit "Bull," despite all his limitations, with a solid if silent good sense and practicality. It would seem as if it is only when this "noble silent People" comes to politics that these saving qualities appear somehow to evaporate.

Such, at any rate, appear to be the more important qualities which fit the citizen for his work, and the case for democracy as against Carlyle may be said to rest upon two cardinal propositions in regard to them. The one is that they are not the monopoly of any single rank, class, or order in the State; and the other, that they exist in sufficient measure in all classes, "from plebs to princeps," to justify a democratic franchise. It is not that these qualifications need be supposed to exist in equal measure among all sorts and conditions of men. Few would say they do. None may know better and, it may be, more bitterly than the hewers of wood and drawers of water the indubitable superiorities that come of an intellectual training such as their lot may have denied them. None may realise more keenly, and sometimes more enviously, the opportunities which titled or affluent leisure may put within the reach of the man who is

* "Past and Present," bk. iii. c. v. The English.

minded to work for public causes. Yet the balance does not dip wholly in favour of the educated, the titled, or the affluent. One must never forget that, among the qualifications for citizenship—and it is not the least—is a face-to-face personal experience of the hardships, miseries and wrongs, which it will remain for long a prime concern of wise legislation and sound administration to extinguish or alleviate. And if this be so, it is not those citizens who are naturally removed from personal contact with these things by a studious or an affluent, or simply a comfortable and easy life, who are best fitted either to press for remedial legislation, or to judge of its effectiveness when passed. Nor can anything be more evident than that, if a tithe of the denunciations, derisions and reproaches which Carlyle hurls at landlordism and capitalism and dilettantism be merited, these classes would stand convicted of blindness and apathy to the social needs that were starting up under their very feet.

Nor is it to be forgotten how much of the work of a democracy lies not in itself solving problems, but in choosing men who can. For it is, of course, inevitable that modern democracy be representative. Its business is not to find delegates but to delegate its powers, and to record its votes for men into whose hands it can resign that initiation of measures and adjustment of details of which it is itself, for many reasons,* inherently incapable. Its truest friends take their stand upon this ground. They plead for the independence of the representative. In the words of Macaulay when arguing for a Whig franchise, “popular institutions once provided will provide the country with fit men.” Carlyle, himself, has told us that the clodpole and the

* See above, p. 35.

featherhead have in them an indestructible instinct of hero-worship. If so, cannot the ordinary citizen, who is neither clodpole nor featherhead, be trusted to find his leader, and to follow him all the more readily, because he is the man of his political choice? *

This, however, is precisely the point upon which Carlyle most decisively joins issue. The reason above all other reasons why, as he contends, democracy is bound to fail is that it cannot choose its true leaders. With all its greed for franchises, and its inordinate appetite for elections, it cannot be trusted in the only election that is of real significance—the election of capacity and worth. Sincere and unquenchable as the promptings of hero-worship may be elsewhere, the objects of its choice in politics would too surely be the Sir Jabesh Windbags of "Past and Present," or even stump-orators and charlatans, worse than he, borne to power by "the temporary hallelujahs of flunkies." It is in truth far from easy to understand Carlyle's exact position here. He does not seem to mean, as some of his critics have averred, that the born leader of men is to dragoon his followers into a servile subservience. An occasional sympathy with the brass collar of Gurth, born thrall of Cedric, and other methods of despotism, must not obscure the fact that he insisted that all genuine hero-worship must be spontaneous and willing.† On the other hand, he is certainly not minded to leave the follower to choose the leader. For this is precisely what, in politics at any rate, he abhors. It has often

* See "A Plea for the Rule of the Majority" in "Ethics of Citizenship," 3rd edition, p. 59. MacLehose & Sons, Glasgow.

† Cf. "'Hero-worship,' if you will—yes, friends; but first of all by being ourselves of heroic mould. A whole world of heroes: a world not of flunkies, where no hero-king *can* reign: that is what we aim at!" ("Past and Present," bk. i. c. vi.)

and justly been urged that Carlyle leaves his readers bewildered as to the precise methods by which his "heroes" are to be placed in power. The one point on which he is entirely explicit is that it will never be by democratic count of heads.

For to him the world was by its very constitution a hierarchy, "extending up degree above degree to Heaven itself and God the Maker," and by consequence, anything that savoured of equality, and especially that instalment of equality which equalises citizens at the door of the polling booth, was a monstrous usurpation. Social salvation lay for him in directly the opposite direction. For it turned on the hope, which till near the middle of the century was even strong and confident, that the great mass of his fellow countrymen still had it in them, as the deepest instinct of their souls, to recognise, to honour and to follow the divinely-elected (and self-elected?) leader of men. This was to him "the everlasting adamant, lower than which the confused wreck of revolutionary things cannot fall." It was "the corner-stone of living rock whereon all politics for the remotest time may stand secure." * Such leaders may be endlessly diverse, and it is the glory of Carlyle that his hero-worship has so many mansions, but they are to be sought for especially in two directions. There are the men of spiritual insight, the prophets and the thinkers who had discerned, beneath all the welter and scramble of human affairs, the old eternal laws that live for ever. This was what he had in mind when he once said that the true struggle of the age was not between Tory and Radical, but between believer and unbeliever—believer and unbeliever in those oracles of eternal justice, by

* See "Past and Present," *passim*, but especially bk. iv.

the observance of which, as he had early come to think, nations live, as by disregard of them they surely decay and die. And there are the men of practical insight, the silent workers of the world, men of but little speculative turn, driven on by ideas of which they are but dimly conscious, who, nevertheless, are in their lives and deeds nothing other than ambassadors of the cosmos. "Ah, yes. I will say it again. The great silent men. Looking round on the noisy inanity of the world, words with little meaning, actions with little worth, one loves to reflect on the great Empire of Silence. The noble, silent men, scattered here and there, each in his department, silently thinking, silently working, whom no morning newspaper makes mention of. They are the salt of the earth.*" To these two, the hero as prophet and the hero as worker, let the world hearken, and all may yet be well. To them let the world refuse to hearken, and democracy, if it would but listen, may already hear the roar of the Niagara over which it is hastening to plunge.

It is not easy to decide to which of these two types Carlyle leans, so fervid is he in his admiration of greatness in all modes, "from Norse Odin to English Samuel Johnson, from the Divine founder of Christianity to the withered Pontiff of Encyclopædism." As the years went on, his sympathies seem to have intensified towards the rugged Brindleys, Arkwrights, Watts, and to the "captains of industry," from whom he looked for much. It has been truly said that it is one of the striking contrasts of his character that, though by choice and disposition a spectator of life, he was always in his strongest sympathies a man of action. Yet this last point must not be pressed unduly. Too

* "Heroes," p. 206.

many readers are carried away by the well-worn designation of Carlyle as "the prophet of work." So he is: there is no watchword dearer to him than "Tools to the man" (not arms and the man, or shirt-frills and the man, as he reminds us). And it has actually been made matter of reproach that in urging mankind, as the sum of the whole matter, to do the duty that lies nearest to hand, he would disastrously withdraw their energies from the more distant and less self-centred duties of citizenship. It is the very criticism which, characteristically, Mazzini passes upon him. But there are two facts which go far to blunt its edge. One is that "work," in the Carlylian vocabulary, is a wide word. It includes, as a memorable passage in "Sartor Resartus" reminds us, the work for "spiritual bread." Johnson and Rousseau, Goethe and Burns are among the workers. Hence the futility of the taunt that Carlyle preached a gospel of work and never did anything himself. The fact of the matter here is not that Carlyle failed to live up to his own gospel of work, but that the criticism fails to interpret that gospel aright. The second consideration is that, in Carlyle's tributes to the practical workers, even the most humble and illiterate, it is never the mere work done that evokes his reverence. In "the great workers" it is the insight, the eye for fact, and the firm faith that lay behind achievement: in the humble, unrecorded workers it is the doing of the work with fidelity as in the great Taskmaster's eye. Few criticisms are further from the mark than the trite imputation that Carlyle worshipped mere blind and brutal force.

This will become clearer when we remember that Carlyle's entire practical teaching, both in politics and

ethics, rested upon certain fundamental convictions which it is now time to proceed to consider. This is the more important because there is a tendency in some quarters where it might have least been expected, to stake Carlyle's claims as a political writer upon the truth or otherwise of his definite prophecies about democracy. It must have startled many students of his Life to read the conditions on which his biographer is willing that his master's writings should be consigned to oblivion. "Carlyle," says Mr. Froude, "like them (*i.e.*, the Hebrew prophets) believed that he had a special message to deliver to the present age. Whether he was correct in that belief, and whether his message was a true message remains to be seen. He has told us that our most cherished ideas of political liberty, with their kindred corollaries, are mere illusions, and that the progress which has seemed to go along with them is a progress towards anarchy and social dissolution. If he was wrong, he has misused his powers. The principles of his teaching are false. He has offered himself as a guide on a road of which he had no knowledge, and his own desire for himself would be the speediest oblivion both of his person and his works.*

It is not necessary to adopt the funereal † estimate. Carlyle himself, it is to be remembered, set but little store upon political prediction. "What thing is foreseen," he asks, "especially what man the parent of things?" But quite apart from this, it is scant justice thus to judge a man of genius by the soundness or otherwise of what is after all but an application, how-

* Preface to "Life," p. xv.

† "His mood," says Professor Masson of Froude's Biography, "is too uniformly like that of a man driving a hearse."

ever important, of a far wider doctrine. It would be nearer the truth to affirm that though all the political predictions which Carlyle ever penned were falsified, though he were proved wrong in his forecasts and Mill and Mazzini right, he would still remain one of the great political writers of the century.

At the very least he has done democracy the service of telling it of its faults, and who will venture to say that it does not need the telling? If Carlyle said many bitter things of his generation, so did Isaiah and Plato and Tacitus and Juvenal and Swift of theirs. This was part of his mission. By temperament and vocation he was a satirist in politics. It little befits English society to complain of his flouts and flings, his mordant humour, his fierce invective, till it can feel with a clear conscience that it has ceased to deserve them. Let it rather lay to heart the injunction of the ancient Cynic: "associate with your enemy, he will be the first to tell you of your faults." For the words of a great satirist, instinct with genius and lit up by humour and pathos, do not lose their value because levelled against causes that are triumphant. It is just the hour of triumph that most needs the salutary whisper, "Remember thou art mortal."

And, then, the words of Carlyle are not powerful only to scathe and to destroy. The very ferocity of his indictment of democracy was born of a passionate perception of how much there was to be done. It was not simply the ineffectuality of democracy that he reviled: it was what he believed to be its impotence *in the presence of great and urgent social ends and issues*. And his championship of the ends remains whether they are to be attained by democratic government or by aristocratic despotism. Enough and to spare re-

mains in his writings for the democratic spirit to feed upon, and perpetually to renew its youth, even when the whole commination service upon "count of heads" be taken as read. For the democratic spirit is one thing and democratic methods of government another.* And though Carlyle did not love the second, few men have done more splendid service to the first. For the root and the fruit of democracy—what are they but the recognition of the worth, dignity and possibilities of the individual life, however flickering and obscure? Carlyle joins hands with Mill and Mazzini here. He outdoes them. No writer in our literature, it is safe to say, has done more for this, the essence of the democratic spirit, than this sworn foe of *political* democracy. "It is not because of his toils that I lament for the poor, we must all toil or steal (howsoever we name our stealing). . . . What I do mourn over is that the lamp of his soul should go out. . . . That there should one man die ignorant who had capacity for knowledge, this I call a tragedy, were it to happen more than twenty times in the minute, as by some computations it does"—this is Carlyle's version of the education question. "'What is to become of our Cotton Trade?' cried certain spinners when the Factory Act was proposed. 'What is to become of our invaluable Cotton Trade?' The Humanity of England answered steadfastly: 'Deliver me these rickety perishing souls of infants, and let your Cotton Trade take its chance,'"—this is his case for Factory legislation. Even in "The Nigger Question," that stone of stumbling and rock of offence to many a disciple, it will be found that, in treating the great cause of slave emancipation with scant respect and deplorable levity, this is, in

* Cf. p. 197.

part at any rate, because his eyes were open to other things nearer home. "It is not to the West Indies that I run first of all. . . . Oh brothers ! Oh sisters ! it is for these white women that my heart bleeds and my soul is heavy." Nor in these days of great cities and massed populations, and imposing movements alike political and economic which threaten to dwarf to insignificance the transitory struggling individual life, can democracy afford to reject, still less to assail the man who, even in his bitterest and most declamatory hour, never forgot that "there is the fifth act of a tragedy on every death-bed though it be a peasant's and on a bed of heath."

It is something more even than this that, beyond all writers of the nineteenth century, Carlyle has borne witness to the spirituality of the foundations upon which society rests. It has been characteristic of this age to produce many writers, and readers, who having, with or without proof, satisfied themselves that society is "an organism," seem to think that no more remains to be said. Evolution has produced the organism : the will of Evolution—if it have a will—be done ! It is not enough for Carlyle. Deeply prejudiced though he was against the teaching of the evolutionists, and lamentably incapable of doing justice to Darwin, he was well aware, none knew better, that society is organic. Never has the subtlety of the ties that bind man to man been drawn to light with more telling and picturesque effect than in the chapter in "Sartor" on "Organic Filaments." But he is not minded to rest content with biological analogies and evolutionary forces. He takes a higher flight. "Generation after generation takes to itself the form of a body, and forth issuing from Cimmerian Night on

Heaven's Mission appears. . . . But whence? Oh Heaven! Whither?" This is the question, as he puts it in what is one of the greatest passages he ever wrote.* It is also the question he tries to answer, not only in the context where he declares it is "from Mystery to Mystery, from God and to God," but in the vehement protest of all his writings, from "Sartor" onwards, against the extrusion of Spirit from explanation whether of the rise or of the fall of nations.

For Carlyle's political doctrines are very far from being political only. "The politics of a higher region encompass him," as Emerson said, and into that higher region the reader must follow him if he hopes to understand the grounds and significance of his teaching on even the most mundane affairs. Nor is the difficulty in following so great as might appear from the fragmentary and disrupted form of his utterance. Suspicious though he was of all closely reasoned construction, and all his life through much more concerned that ideas should be realised in life than that they should be systematised in thought, it will be found that all his leading convictions are far enough from floating loose and incoherent. This will appear if we proceed at once to ask what these ideas are.

At the root of all else lies a conviction, intense, unfaltering, far-reaching, of the mutability of the world of appearances. No writer of any age has surpassed him in this, not the Hebrew psalmists, nor Plato, nor Marcus Aurelius, nor Omar Khayam, nor even Spinoza himself, great reasoning prophet of the unsubstantiality of all finite things. For this conviction met Carlyle at every turn. The obscure annals of his quiet Annandale countryside suggested it. So did the hurrying

* "Sartor Resartus," bk. iii. c. viii. Natural Supernaturalism.

crowds of the Strand. He never forgot it, nor could forget it. To look at all ordinary things was for him to look through them, with an eye which, even in the pride of life and the great tides of affairs, detected the transitoriness of the whole falsely-satisfying unsubstantial spectacle. He tells us how one evening he passed through the little town of Annan, where years before he had been a schoolboy. "Annan Street had groups of prentice lads in it, and maid-servants in white aprons. Tom Willison's shop-light was shining far up the street, but Tom himself, I suppose, is laid long since in the everlasting night, or the everlasting day." What he here saw in the unrecorded pathos of humble life, he saw elsewhere on the larger scale. On the broadest page of history, as he reads it, is written the same disillusioning message. All things pass. Even the vastest of historic movements and the most gorgeous pageantries, are after all—what are they but shadows which come and go, in frail and temporary substantiation, across some more enduring background of Life or Nature, which in its turn is itself to be engulfed by all-devouring Chronos. It is so with your "national wars," your "Moscow retreats," your "sanguinary hate-filled revolutions." They are all but "the somnambulism of uneasy sleepers," the "dreaming which on earth we call life." And so on the great procession moves, from the little life and unmarked death of a country carrier to the fall of an empire or the collapse of a civilisation.

It is beyond our scope to trace the sources of this conviction. Apart from the influences of the Hebrew Scriptures and some aspects of German idealism, it doubtless came simply of the personal experience that life is a fleeting and unsatisfying thing at best, and of that broad outlook upon fact and history which seldom

fails to dwarf all single episodes and events. Enough that it stands written broadly on all the Carlylian writings so that even he who runs may read it there.*

And yet it is this prophet of the mutability of empires and civilisations, nay, of the unsubstantiality of Nature herself, who is ready to tell a country-ditcher that his life is an epic, and to remind the world that there is the fifth act of a tragedy on every death-bed though it be on a bed of heath ; who claims for the day-drudge the possibility of writing on the eternal skies the record of a heroic life ; who honours the hard hand of the mason as much as if it held a sceptre ; who is quick to ascribe to a fact how trivial soever it may seem, a significance not to be conceded to the greatest creation of imagination ; who has won from a brother historian the tribute that in historic research he joins to the genius of a poet the care of an antiquary ;† and who, more perhaps than any writer of our century, has dedicated his powers to preaching the wonder of the dew-drop or the withered leaf.

Does it not seem as if there must be contradiction somewhere ? Now, the great world itself is shadow and illusion, "the dreaming that men call life" : the mood passes, and the hammer or the pick-axe, the morning cloud or the hyssop that springeth on the wall, has become the theme of a gospel.

Yet contradiction is a word we must not use here. For the contradiction vanishes as soon as it becomes apparent that this conviction of Mutability, written so large upon the Carlylian page, is not the last word, though it may be the first, of Carlyle's philosophy. In point of fact, his almost Oriental sense of mutability

* See especially "Sartor Resartus," bk. iii. c. viii.

† J. R. Green's "Short History," vol. iii. p. 1141.

is but the step to a faith which nothing ever shook in the reality and immutability of a world of unseen law.

If this transition seems startling, it is to be borne in mind that it is one which the human mind, with an audacity which would pluck belief from doubt, and life from the very jaws of death, has not hesitated again and again to attempt. The prophet, the poet, the metaphysician, the unlettered man even whose spirit has been touched by the hungers and thirsts of religious aspiration, have all believed that somehow they could pass this gulf. All of them have striven, some by the groping trackless ways of mysticism, some by firm highway of philosophy, to find permanence beyond mutability, reality behind illusion, being beneath the very flux and nothingness of things. Carlyle follows them. We can read it in his conversations, his diaries, in all his writings, and in none so unmistakably as what he calls (not altogether aptly) "the high Platonic mysticism" * of "Sartor Resartus." It was the experience of Teufelsdröckh as it stands written in "Sartor Resartus." For when that "Platonic mystic" rose in protest against "the Everlasting No," † and all the World and the Fiend had done to crush him, it was not to nurse the barren consciousness of an abstract and empty spiritual freedom. It was to turn from the corrosive sorrows, the maddening obstructions, of his own embittered lot to the larger life of the impersonal world—

* No one can be justified in coupling "mysticism" with the name of Plato, whose "Dialectic" is the very antithesis of mysticism.

† Hasty readers are apt to think that by "the Everlasting No" is signified the repudiation by Teufelsdröckh of the worst the world can do against him. But "the Everlasting No" is the world's message to Teufelsdröckh. It was "the Everlasting No" "when the Fiend said 'Worship me or be torn in shreds.'" Teufelsdröckh's renunciation of the world and all the Fiend can do is his answer to "the Everlasting No."

to the treasured achievements of ancient cities, to the buried valour of world-famous battlefields—in a word, to the two-fold text of the book of Revelation, the text written in the lives of heroes and the other text of great libraries. This was his “Centre of Indifference”; and small wonder if the passionate egoism of Teufelsdröckh’s earlier years was forgotten in the greatness of the spectacle. And yet it was not a spectacle only. For as he looked upon it with those eyes that looked through clothes till they became transparent, intuition struck fire upon experience, appearances grew luminous with a new light, and through the veil of Nature and of the long procession of life the truth dawned that “the universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but Godlike and my Father’s.”* It was so that Teufelsdröckh passed to “The Everlasting Yea.”

Such is the parable of Carlyle’s own passage from a conviction of the mutability of things to a belief in eternal Law. It is no paved highway, no firm arch, he claims to have built. And to the last he flung his missiles at all close logical synthesis, especially if it seemed to him over-confident. He is content with his “zig-zag series of rafts,” his “flying pontoons” over the impassable. But he never doubts that the crossing can be accomplished. An endless variety of phrase, an endless monotony of conviction, enforce, on a hundred pages, the final conclusion that mutability and illusion, be their empire never so wide, are but the appearances, woven upon that cunningly-wrought curtain of Space and Time, which lies between our imperfect vision and realities that are abiding. Nor, be its “logic” what it may, is this belief in ultimate realities ever more

* “Sartor Resartus,” bk. ii. c. ix.

strongly held by Carlyle than when he realises, with a profound and pitying sympathy, the transitoriness of life, and the fragility of tenure by which the generations of short-lived men hold the earth. It is the creed of his disciple Emerson,

"If my bark sinks,
'Tis to another sea."

His own strong words need no further comment: "Know of a truth that only the Time-Shadows have perished or are perishable; that the real being of whatever was, and whatever is, and whatever will be, is now and for ever."

Carlyle, then, takes this momentous step. But it is not to rest there. For if he believes in unseen laws, he believes also that these laws exist *that they may be enacted*. This was, in the main, because he conceived spiritual reality as spiritual Force. Hence his protest against the "Absentee God" who sits on the outskirts of His Universe to watch it go. Hence his insistence that this all-pervading Force is present even in the evaporation of the rain-drop or the rotting of the leaf. This conviction runs throughout. "Eternal Law," he writes, "is silently present everywhere and everywhen. By Law the planets gyrate in their orbits: by some approach to Law the street cabs ply in the thoroughfares." Nothing less than this will satisfy his hunger for what is concrete and actual. Hardly has he ceased prophesying upon the mutability of the world before he is—like Plato again in this—bidding us turn to the world once more to see in its very dust and drift a revelation of eternal Ideas.

This comes out vividly in his attitude to Emerson. A man's disciples are sometimes his best correctives;

and Carlyle seems to have felt that Emerson and his followers were, just by reason of their faith in Ideas, in danger of falling into an airy and over-easy optimism which failed to do justice to concrete fact. "You seem to me," so he writes, "in danger of dividing yourselves from the Fact of this present Universe, in which alone, ugly as it is, can I find any anchorage." He is more explicit still: "I will have all things condense themselves, take shape and body if they are to have my sympathy. I have a body myself: in the brown leaf, sport of the Autumn winds, I find what mocks all prophesyings, even Hebrew ones."* Nor is it too much to say that it is as prophet of this doctrine that Ideas (or Laws) must find enactment, that Carlyle has done most for his generation. There may be passages in which at times he seems to sink into pessimism: he can see in the insane scramble of human affairs little but a tale told by an idiot. Hence his disgusts, his satire, his ferocious invective against cants and shams. Yet this is but the bitterness of an inverted idealism. It bespeaks no loss of faith. Justice may be delayed: "men and nations may perish as if without Law;" yet his final word is firm, "I tell thee again, there is nothing else but Justice."† Hence the other, the practical side of Carlyle. For, despite all his acceptance of Mutability, his belief in the eternal and resistless activity of Spirit compels him to reinstate, though with a deepened significance, that same endless procession of human affairs in which he had erewhile seemed to seek in vain for any substantiality at all. It is necessary to dwell on this because it furnishes the key to much in his writings.

* "Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson," vol. ii. pp. 11, and i. 304.

† "Past and Present," bk. i. c. ii. One of his great passages.

Thus—glancing for a moment at the form of his message—it partly explains both his humour and his pathos. For humour and pathos have both their root in the perception of contrasts, and Carlyle's view of life was such that contrast verging upon contradiction could never be far from him. Thus there are times when, as he writes, the tragedy of life seems to be darkening down with every word. But it does not darken into night. For the thought of the evanescence, the nothingness of all the ways of men asserts itself, and the tragedy dissolves in a sudden laughter of sunshine. “Nay, I think with old Hugo von Trimberg: God must needs laugh outright, could such a thing be, to see his wondrous mannikins here below.” And though the end is not always, perhaps not oftenest, laughter, it comes through similar contrasts.* As Teufelsdröckh has it: “light dancing with guitar music will be going on in the forecourt, while by fits from within comes the faint whimpering of woe and wail.” It could not be otherwise. For the humour and pathos of Carlyle are not decorations. They are of the essence of the changing movement of his thought. They come of his way of looking at what he once called the “divine-infernal” spectacle of life. The reader who forgets this will never understand him. A high authority has asked if the same fountain can bring forth bitter and sweet. It can, it does, in Carlyle, in whom, if in any writer of the world, “the roots of the tree of laughter lie close to the well of tears.”

Enough, however, of the manner of his message.

* Some of the most striking passages in “The French Revolution” owe their influence to this. Cf., e.g., “French Revolution,” bk. v. c. v. Also c. vii. “Oh, evening sun of July,” &c.

Our present concern is with its substance. For it is in this that all his most characteristic doctrines find their explanation.

It is so with his philosophy of Revolutions. Seeley has called him in this connection the prophet of national decay ;* and he is never greater than when illustrating revolution that is past or foreboding revolution to come. But when his mind thus turns to destruction and decay, it is for the healthy reason that in the horrors of insurrection, in the "roaring Hell-porch of a Hotel de Ville," he can read "as by flashes of lightning" the eternal vitality of Justice and the vigilance of Divine judgment. "I should not have known what to make of this world at all," he once said to Froude, "if it had not been for the French Revolution." For it was not as a new beginning that he read that supreme catastrophe : it was as an ending, a Judgment, a proclamation of the bankruptcy of imposture, a sowing of the wind and a reaping of the whirlwind.†

Closely akin are his views upon Punishment. It happened (some time before 1850) that he went to visit one of those model prisons which, thanks to Romilly and Mackintosh, had by that time taken the place of the styes in which John Howard did his work. And having seen how, within its walls, "the Devil's regiments of the line" were provided for, he passed out into a squalid quarter, hovelled in which "the unfortunates not yet enlisted into that force" were struggling manifoldly to "keep the Devil out of Doors and *not* enlist with him." Hence this outburst in the "Latter Day Pamphlets," in which, with more than habitual fury, he insists on the duty of hating criminals, and if

* "Lectures and Essays," p. 124.

† Cf. especially "French Revolution," bk. v. c. i.

need be even, when all else fails (not till then) of “cutting them off in the name of God.”

Many readers saw in this nothing but reaction towards the old ferocious methods that turned the country into a shambles ; and the pamphlet is beyond gainsaying Rhadamanthine. Yet the matter has another, a Carlylian side. For even were it true, as some aver, that “the more society abhors crime, the less it punishes it,” this would be no fit legend to engrave upon the lintels of our model prisons—not at any rate until we feel certain that the less we punish crime the more do we abhor it; thereby taking security against the facile pity and the doctrinaire toleration which do but “murder pardoning those that kill.”* It was this side of the question that appealed to Carlyle. It is false to stigmatise him, as some have, as if he were a mere ferocious apostle of revenge. Crime and criminals were hateful to him, and he longed that the arm of human justice should strike them down, because he saw in them a defiance of those higher laws of righteousness that are written “on the adamant tablet and on the iron leaf” by the finger of Justice. For with this Calvinist—Calvinist in spirit long after he had ceased to be so in formula—it is law and vindication of law from first to last. “He is always repeating himself,” said his critics. So he is. He says the same thing over and over again. But this may be a merit. For when prophets cease repeating their convictions there will be few convictions worth the repeating.

Similarly with his teaching upon Might and Right and their relation. It has often been grotesquely

* “Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill.”—*Romeo and Juliet*, III. i.

misunderstood: it always will be misunderstood if it is not regarded in its true light as part of Carlyle's creed as to the relation of God to the world. Carlyle never fails to see that Might differs from Right. From hour to hour they may differ "frightfully:" that is his word. Nor can this difference ever pass into identity through the success however prolonged of brute non-moral force. For this is the direct opposite of Carlyle's teaching. Process cannot make Right, if it be the fact—and if he taught anything he taught this—that Right stands distinct from Wrong in the very decrees of God. There is of course much controversy, familiar enough, as to whether in his interpretation of particular historical personages, he is not over-ready to see in them the instruments of God, or at very least the scourges of God, where other interpreters would hesitate to claim any such credentials for them. This is a question for historians. Let them decide, or agree to differ, whether Frederick or Mirabeau or Napoleon were as Carlyle draws them. Meanwhile the fact remains that these, like other Carlylian estimates which have seemed to critics all too favourable, are so far from being due to over-eagerness to deify brute force and worship success that they are due to precisely the opposite proclivity. Their true derivation lies in a passionate life-long yearning to see justice done, and in a faith that refused to believe that "the old eternal laws that live for ever" could permanently remain without their witness upon earth. Carlyle could not think otherwise without infidelity to his fundamental conviction that if laws, Divine and immutable, exist they will sooner or later find enactment. Lecky had once attacked him for taking

Might as the symbol of Right. "I shall have to tell Lecky one day," is Carlyle's rejoinder, "that quite the converse or reverse is "the great and venerable author's" real opinion, viz., that right is the eternal symbol of might; "as I hope one day (he) . . . will with amazement and real gratification discover; and that in fact he probably never met with a son of Adam more contemptuous of might except when it rests on the above origin."* It is difficult, indeed, to reconcile contradictory indictments of Carlyle. This critic will have it that his Eternities and Immensities are mere abstractions, and that in his outlook on actual life he is a raging pessimist: that one stigmatises him as a worshipper of success. Of the two the last is furthest from the mark. "Thy 'success'? Poor devil, what will thy 'success' amount to? If the thing is unjust thou hast not succeeded."†

We are now in a position better to understand Carlyle's political teaching. Like Plato, with whom he was in many points, though for long unconsciously, at one, he believes in Ideas—Ideas which are the immutable objects of human thought and insight. Like Plato he longs for the coming of the day when these Ideas shall be enacted in human affairs. Like Plato he bitterly realises how hard it is to enact them in a world given over to flux, irrationality, falsehood, illusion and self-seeking. And like Plato—not least like that great prophet of aristocracy in this—he is convinced that the kingdom of Ideas can be realised, not by the initiative of the *io πόλλοι* who spend their years in a vain show, but by the elect spirits, the Carlylian "heroes," the Platonic "philosopher-kings," who are the

* "Life in London," ii. p. 422.

† "Past and Present," bk. i. c. ii.

ambassadors of the Cosmos. Small wonder that Carlyle should have come to recognise the kinship when the parallel is so close. The two great implacable foes of democratic government part company only when the one, true to the Greek spirit, insists that the saviour of society must stand equipped in all the panoply of Dialectic and closely reasoned system, and the other, hovering on the verge of Mysticism, is content with "the zig-zag series of rafts," "the flying pontoons," of loosely-knit thoughts which in him take the place of a philosophy. The divergence is not slight. But it is at most the divergence of thinkers who are at one in the belief that all that is best in human life comes of conscious dependence of the finite spirit upon eternal realities.

When, finally, we pass from politics to ethics—for the two domains are inseparably interwoven—it is to encounter the same ultimate convictions.

The worst calamity that can befall a man, as Carlyle thinks, is not misery however acute, nor hardship however grinding. Worse by far is obstruction. "Not I cannot eat, but I cannot work, is the burden of all wise complaining among men." This was the trial of Teufelsdröckh as we have it in "Sartor." The world at every turn shut its doors in his face, and cast him forth, a useless waif, all through the bitter years when he was enacting "the stern monodrama ; no object and no rest," and struggling in vain to get his destiny as a man fulfilled. This was "The Everlasting No." It was an experience burnt into Carlyle's mind by his own long, uphill, and at times all but desperate struggle. We know from the "Life" how the text that rang in his ears, as in those of his great temporary, J. S. Mill, was "The night cometh." *Nulla*

dies sine linea, so he wrote, often enough, in his diary. Nor is his reiterated message, "Know thy work and do it," to be read, as it sometimes is, as the resource, the refuge of a strong spirit to whom speculative doubts have left the universe an enigma. For the "Work" of which Carlyle is the prophet is always urged, from "Sartor Resartus," onwards, as the sure path by which the worker brings himself, consciously or unconsciously, into harmony with the supreme laws of life, and in due season, if the work be honest, to a belief such as speculative arguments alone can never give, in a Divine law of duty that is over all. Doubt is not removed but by action—there is no refrain more constant than this in Carlyle's writings, from first to last.

Hence the Carlylian scorn of idleness. The idler, we read, must either be beggar or thief. But worse even than this is the fact that he is outlaw and outcast. "Looking up, looking down, around, behind or before, discernest thou, if it be not in Mayfair alone, any *idle* hero, saint, god, or even devil? Not a vestige of one. In the Heavens, in the Earth, in the Waters under the Earth, there is none like unto thee." *

If this be the worst, we can already guess, if only by contrast, what is the best, or in other words what is that supreme good for man which, since the days of Socrates, has been called by many a varied name. Carlyle's name for it in "Sartor" is Blessedness. But the word itself will help us little: it is so apt to be construed as nothing more than a superior kind of Happiness, and this, of course, is precisely what it is not. Upon this point Carlyle has left us in no uncertainty. When first he came upon the scene as

* "Past and Present," bk. iii. c. xii.

man of letters, the ethical school he found in possession of the field was Benthamism with its thrice-familiar watchword of "Greatest Happiness," or more strictly construed, Greatest Pleasure. One cannot say that Carlyle argues with these utilitarian hedonists. There is satire, invective, derision, parody, everything almost except argument. He is like Dr. Johnson ; when his pistol misses fire he knocks down the enemy with the butt end. And it may well have been among the peculiar trials of philosophers so earnest as the two Mills, or George Grote, that the adversary will so often not so much as take them seriously.

Yet it is here as usual. Behind the rhetoric there are reasons. For these diatribes are more than scoffs, invectives, parodies. They come of the settled conviction that hedonism is doomed to failure because it gives a fatally false centre to life. It centres all in pleasure. The pleasure may be that of the individual (as *ultimately* it is with Bentham), or it may be the pleasure of the whole sentient creation, as it is in the doctrine of the younger Mill. But in either case (though it is not to be forgotten that it is egoistic hedonism that Carlyle denounces) the centre round which all else revolves is pleasure or escape from pain. It was not thus that Carlyle regarded human life. The world, "God's seed-field and Task-Garden" is, on his view of it, nothing if not a scene overshadowed, interpenetrated by Law, "inflexible, righteous, eternal, not to be questioned by the sons of men." As in the physical world it is Law that governs alike the orbit of the planet and the evaporation of the dewdrop, so in the world of action it is Law that lays its equally inexorable commands upon the human will. This is the centre of gravity of the moral universe ; and this being

so, it is the main concern of a man to see to it that his life is in actual willing harmony with this central Fact. It is on record that that "Scotch Voltaire" Lord Jeffrey—oh wise judge!—once tried to persuade Carlyle that it was not a man's duty to concern himself with his relations to the Universe. As well might a polished Sadducee have set himself to dissuade the Baptist from preaching repentance. To find his true relations to the Universe is to Carlyle the whole Duty of man!

It is an attitude which will bring its own consolations. For we must not number Carlyle among the stoics who invest Duty with a grimness which would freeze emotion at its source. Himself emotional in almost every line he penned, he has told us in "The Everlasting Yea" of the peace and of the infinite pitying love for men that came at last into the storm-tossed soul of *Teufelsdröckh*.* Yet it is not this emotional experience, even though it be "sweeter than Dayspring to the Shipwrecked," that is the prime object of endeavour. It is *the actual rightness of relation* between the individual will and the moral Law. Whatever more than this may belong to Blessedness, this is its essence.

No other conclusion was consistently possible for Carlyle. If, to his eye, mutability was written broad upon the face of the world, even upon many things which men and nations live and die for, how much more upon the fragile tenements of all human pleasure. "Behold, the day is passing swiftly over, our life is passing swiftly over: and the night cometh, wherein no man can work. The night once come, our happiness, our unhappiness—it is all abolished; vanished;

* "Sartor Resartus," bk. ii. c. ix.

clean gone ; a thing that has been. . . . But our work —behold that is not abolished, that has not vanished ; our work behold it remains, or the want of it remains ; for endless Times and Eternities remains ; and that is now the sole question for us for evermore ! Brief brawling Day, with its noisy phantasms, its poor paper crowns tinsel gilt, is gone ; and divine everlasting Night, with her star diadems, with her silences and her veracities, is come. What hast thou done, and how ?”*

No ethical writer of any age has felt this more profoundly than Carlyle. It was the verdict of his own struggling, aspiring, for ever-unsatisfied life. It was the conviction he brought back from his contact with the world, and from an encyclopædic knowledge of history and biography. “ Love not pleasure ; love God ”—this, the conclusion of “ Sartor,” is the note of all he wrote upon ethical subjects.

It was a faith up to which he himself strove to live, and not in vain. Many a critic has since he died been busy with his reputation. But to all that has been said there is one answer. It is not the only answer, but it is one which cannot be gainsaid ; “ his work remains ; the want of that does not remain.” It is not its magnitude alone, though its magnitude is vast. Nor is it that, in all he touched—essay, biography, history, prose-poem, reflective thought—he reveals the master’s hand. It is still more the proof he has given, from the days when as an Annandale lad he trudged along the moorland roads to the University of Edinburgh till, in extreme old age, the pitcher was at last broken at the cistern, that the life of letters can be made the path of courage, devotion, faithfulness, and victory.

* “ Past and Present,” bk. iii. c. iv.

JOSEPH MAZZINI

THE RELIGIOUS RADICALISM OF MAZZINI

IT was the central aim of Mazzini's life to make democracy alike in thought and in action religious. In the Italian revolution of 1848 it was his privilege, none dearer to his heart, to have entrusted to him the flag of the volunteers on which was the inscription "God and the People." It was the flag he was carrying all his life: in that inscription is to be found the text of every word he wrote. And of all the democratic watchwords, "rights of man," "greatest happiness," "no monopoly," "tools to the man who can use them," none could satisfy him. Nothing could satisfy him but the old cry of the Crusader, "God wills it: God wills it." For from early years he was painfully struck by the fact that democracy and religion seemed to have sundered. "If anything ever profoundly surprised me," he says of democracy, "it is that so many persons have hitherto been blind to the profoundly religious character of that movement." Nor did the fault lie solely with democracy. It lay also (so he thought) at the door of Christianity which, by its unpractical other-worldliness, its undue preoccupation with private piety, and above all its detachment from the political duties, went far to forfeit his allegiance.

He had justification here. It cannot be affirmed

that the great democratic changes of the nineteenth century were, broadly speaking, carried through in the name of religion. Not, certainly, in England. Hardly in a single case, except in the emancipation of the slave and, to a lesser degree, in factory legislation, can it be said that it was in the name of religion that reform was pressed forward. It was no sympathy with Roman Catholicism that passed Catholic emancipation: it was the idea of political equality. It was no sense of the value of Nonconformist religion that got rid of Tests: it was the claim for political justice. Still less was it so with Free Trade or questions of imperial or municipal franchise. Probably the citizen may have been upheld in these and many other struggles by spiritual motives. There may have been much religion in his life, even in his politics, though there was not much on his lips. In this way the private religious inspirations of personal lives may be a force even in the most secular movements. This however is matter of conjecture, and against it must be set certain tendencies which, already in Mazzini's day, and in increasing measure since, have made steadily for the secularisation of politics.

One is the tendency in some quarters to reduce politics to an exciting game, "an eternal cricket-match between blue and yellow," to use Maine's belittling metaphor. Another is the disposition to view public life as nothing more than public business—a mere matter of fact affair in which the invocation of spiritual motives would be as absurd as liturgies in a counting-house or a government office. A third is the trend of democracy to engross itself in the more materialistic problems. Not unnaturally. For it lies on the face of history that this country—and other countries—

have, as the nineteenth century ran its course, become industrialised and commercialised to the core. An extraordinary conspiracy of causes which it is needless to recite has co-operated to this result. Never since the world began has there been such an increase of wealth. And never has the need for material resources made itself more prominent even in the more spiritual causes, be it in churches or in universities, in schools or institutions for grappling with disease, or in the manifold projects of social philanthropy. To this we need not return. It was, as we have seen, the movement of which Cobden was the prophet. Nor need it be deplored. It is never the end of a nation to diminish its riches ; its problem is to spiritualise increase of riches. But the movement has its dangers. It materialises. It secularises. It absorbs a people more and more in economic ends which lie at furthest remove from moral and religious motives. It is the inevitable risk which every nation runs by becoming rich. Only a spiritual people can spiritualise great riches, especially when great riches go with great want of riches. Nor is it rash to say that the magnitude of the conflict, the conflict about property, which seems opening out before democracy in the present age, is likely to put the spiritual forces of society to the proof. It was precisely this that wrought upon Mazzini's fears. His hatred of the materialistic programme of the Manchester School is so intense that one might suppose it would have precipitated him into Socialism. And so it might—for he has much in common with the socialists—had it not been that he dreaded that the socialists by drawing all political effort into an absorbing struggle between poverty and riches would materialise and secularise the democracy in their very effort to save it.

As with the movements, so with the thinkers. The thinkers of democracy had had much to say about political justice, and natural rights, about greatest happiness and utility—not much about religion. Neither Bentham nor James Mill nor John Stuart Mill were, in any ordinary sense, religious thinkers. To judge from their own words, they would probably have resented the imputation. And though Cobden, like Bright, now and again lifts up current politics into the lofty region of theistic appeal—did he not call Free Trade the “international law of the Almighty”?—Cobden, as his biographer tells us, “was not of those who live much in the unseen.” The secularity of all of them is unmistakable. As we think of the cheerful religious indifference of Bentham, the sensationalistic reaction against orthodoxy of James Mill, the attenuated theism of his son, the mundane practicability of Cobden, it is not too much to say that even had they wished to give democracy a religious creed, which they did not, all these men in holy alliance had not so much as the makings of such a creed amongst them. Similarly with nineteenth century socialism. The “Christian socialists,” it is true, with Maurice and Kingsley at their head, made a gallant attempt to capture socialism for Christianity. And their effort may always serve as a (perhaps needful) reminder that there is no essential bond between socialism and secularism. Yet it will hardly be disputed that the real thing, the formidable socialism of Marx and Lassalle and their following, has gone upon its own way marching on usually towards secularism and sometimes, to judge by their own avowals, towards a pronounced atheism.*

* Lecky gives some startling evidence of this in “Democracy and Liberty,” vol. ii. p. 255.

All this is what Mazzini was determined to change once and for ever. "The religious question," he wrote late in life, "pursues me like a remorse ; it is the only one of any real importance." All his hopes for democracy were staked upon its rescue from materialism and secularism. We have his own words here : "On the day when democracy shall elevate itself to the position of a religious party it will carry away the victory, *not before*." This was the task to which he dedicated his life, and he held to it with the same unfaltering faith and the same unwavering pertinacity with which he wrought for Italian freedom. He long meditated a book upon religion. It was to be his *magnum opus*, and he often chafed, as the years went on, that it was still left undone. But he might well have spared himself his self-reproaches. For, all his life through, he was writing on religion. Religion and politics were in his mind inseparable. To write on the one was to write on the other. Hence the glowing fervour of his phrase. Hence the sustained elevation of his appeal, coupling as it does even the homeliest duties with the loftiest motives. It is not politics as politics are usually written ; it is a kind of oratorio in politics.

Nor had he the slightest doubt as to what above all other things was needed. It was a creed—a creed to be held not only by such as might in reflective hours wish to justify their motives to themselves, but to be as the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day to radical reformers in the actual campaigns of politics. In this sense Mazzini believed in the need for dogma. Not Catholic dogma nor yet Protestant—for of both he was severely critical—yet dogma in the sense of a settled body of convictions as to the relation of men and nations to God, to which the spirit of

leaders and followers alike might ever return for unfailing inspiration and refreshment. Of the possibility of such a creed he was supremely confident. He was prepared to formulate it himself. He even seemingly looked forward to the coming of a day when a new spiritual power would from a regenerated Rome formulate the new Faith for Italy and the world.

It is not within our scope to examine Mazzini's religious creed, and to test the grounds on which he held it. Philosophers and theologians will probably agree that he underrated the difficulties of construction. He was too rationalistic to lean on authority: he was not rationalistic enough to trust to reason when it took the form of metaphysical analysis, of which he had an impatience bordering on hatred. "We will sweep out all that stuff," was his significant remark about Hegelianism.* He was a man of intuitions not of analysis. It was convictions he cared for, not inferences and ratiocinations. He is more akin here to Carlyle than to the philosophers. Be this, however, as it may, the point that concerns us here is that he was absolutely convinced that without a religious faith democracy was foredoomed to failure; and the question of interest is Why?

The answer lies in two convictions, upon both of which Mazzini is explicit to emphasis; the one, that nothing less than an unfaltering sense of duty can nerve and sustain the democratic citizen, the other that this consciousness of duty must stand or fall with a theistic faith. We must glance at these in turn.

There is a popular belief that democracy has much to give; and Mazzini shared it to the full. He was optimist enough to think that democracy carried in it

* See Bolton King's "Mazzini," p. 275.

the promise of honest livelihood and carefree home, of sound education and an unobstructed civic life, rich in many and varied forms of free association. But he also believed, if he believed anything, that it had in its hand a greater gift than these—the gift of the obligation to live, and if need be readily to die for one's country. Truly he was no preacher or promiser of smooth things to his generation. It startles us to read of the burdens which, in his own political career, he laid on the consciences of citizens. It was neither by mother's tears, nor friends' remonstances that he could be for a moment stayed in sending young and ardent spirits upon missions which he knew meant death. It was not callousness—for he had one of the tenderest of hearts—nor was it recklessness, which was far from his conspiring and far-seeing mind. It was the settled conviction that failure and death intrepidly encountered are the really sanest and in the long run the most fruitful tribute to political duty. "Merciful," says Carlyle of him, in a startling conjunction of epithets, "*merciful and fierce*." For his own part, he habitually took his liberty and his life in his hands. And there was a memorable moment in his career, when in '49 the short-lived Roman Republic lay at the mercy of French bayonets, and when, as one of the triumvirs, he urged the Romans to prove to the world that "republics founded upon Faith and Duty neither yield nor capitulate, but die protesting."

This deification of Duty had as obverse a complete distrust of the democracy of Rights. Mazzini's fear for democracy was not the ordinary fear. The ordinary fear is that it will go too far; Mazzini's is that it will go not far enough, because it may rest fatally contented with the enjoyment of its rights.

This is the warning that runs through the hortatory and passionate pages of "The Duties of Man."* It was not that he undervalued civil and political rights. He knew well that these were fundamental conditions of all else. He was the last man to disparage the struggle for rights. But the pity of it was, and the danger, that the citizen, having got his rights, should fancy that this was all, and blindly think that rights were the end instead of, as in truth they are, only the beginnings of a true citizenship. What is the right of free utterance if a man have no word of sincerity or sense to utter? Or the right to worship God to him who shows no desire, either in churches or out of them, to worship anything? Or the right of property to the hewer of wood and drawer of water who can barely earn a subsistence? Or the right to vote to the citizen who is so corrupt that he sells it, or so indifferent that he uses it either not at all or with a deplorable levity? This is the line of thought that saturates Mazzini. He may not have done full justice to rights: he surely did not when he said that "men will not die for rights." It is not the less true that he knew how to value rights more than many from whose lips the word was never absent. For he saw, as only too many cannot see, that the winning of rights is but one of those half-victories which is a whole defeat if the lesson be not learnt, that when a people has won its rights, it is then only for the first time in a position to begin effectively to do its duties. For there are two ways of teaching mankind to value their rights. The one is to speak to them of their wrongs, and to wake up within them that fury against

* In vol. iii. of "Life and Writings," but also published separately.

injustice which is one of the most indestructible passions of the human heart. Nor is this a way unknown to Mazzini. If the Italy we know is another Italy than that of his youth, it is, in part at least, because Mazzini did not know how to spare a despot, whether in Church or in State. "Merciful and fierce." Yet it was not in this method that he reposed his trust, but in the more excellent way of lodging in the heart and imagination of the citizen an ideal of what he had it in him to achieve if only his just rights were given him. It is not rights, it is duties that is the really fundamental and quickening conception.

As with rights, so with interests. It has been said that Mazzini failed to do justice to Utilitarianism, and the fact need not be denied. His biographer tells us that there is no sign of his having read Mill.* If he had, he would doubtless have done more justice to the utilitarian ideal which in so many points is like his own. Even in his handling of Bentham, against whom his attack is levelled, he never seems to realise the width of the gulf that parts the Benthamite, with his splendid devotion to the public good, from the fanatics of natural rights. Yet even his failures here serve all the better to illustrate the point. It was because he was so wholly out of sympathy with utilitarianism that he could not do justice to it, and the reason of his lack of sympathy was the conviction that the utilitarian appeal, resting as it does on hedonism, was inadequate to the sacrifices democracy demands. It was equally impotent, he thought, to evoke the spirit of sacrifice and to justify it. It is in vain, so runs his

* Bolton King's "Mazzini," p. 254.

characteristic sum of the whole matter, to adjure mankind in the name of pleasure to die.

It is not to be denied that this criticism at any rate assails utilitarianism on a weak point. When Bentham said that the word *ought* ought to be expunged from the vocabulary of morals, he was certainly giving a hostage to his enemies. He was confirming their suspicion that the Benthamite appeals to Greatest Happiness were, after all, conditional. For were they not conditional upon the contingency that, by grace of nature or by operation of "the external sanctions," self-interest may come to take the form of benevolence. Even Mill, decisive though his divergence from Bentham is, leaves the call to self-sacrifice appropriate only to the select minority in whom social feeling has found favouring soil and needful nurture.* There is, in strict logic, no room even in his gospel for those unconditional, those categorical appeals which, however hard to justify in theory, are the clamant practical necessities of reformers. It is, at any rate, in these appeals that Mazzini reposes all his trust. He has a horror of the utilitarian spirit of calculation and compromise. He thinks it would sap all unselfish and heroic effort. He has scant respect for the hypothetical heroism which will undertake difficult duties only under the guidance of political arithmetic. The one sufficient security lies for him in the clear line of duty absolutely without compromise, paltering, or shadow of turning. He would have *ought* and *can* as inseparably knit in the reformer's creed as in the theory of Kant.

This is high and heroic doctrine. And we must now go on to add that, in Mazzini's eyes, it is like-

* See p. 59.

wise impossible doctrine if it does not rest upon a convinced theism. For Mazzini is not to be numbered among those to whom religious beliefs are more or less probable hypotheses or even needful moral postulates. His belief in God is not a superstructure built on his belief in Duty. On the contrary, his gospel of Duty depends upon his faith in God. Hence his life-long aspiration and effort to make democracy theistic. For a godless democracy was, in his eyes, a democracy with the sinews of all dutiful and sacrificing effort cut.

This is, of course, a strong asseveration. It is not likely to pass unchallenged. And it will certainly be challenged by some in these latter days more than it was in Mazzini's lifetime, though even then he was to most but as a voice crying in the wilderness. For it cannot be said that, since Mazzini's day, democracy has moved towards theism. The drift has been towards "Darwinism in politics." Hence the growth of the conception that society must now be relegated to its place in the order of Nature as a slowly-evolved organism within which the struggle for existence between individuals and groups is checked and softened only by the exigencies of the larger struggle for existence between nation and nation. No one is likely nowadays to deny that the conception has its measure of truth and its fascinations. Nor is it in the least to be wondered at that there are minds to whom it seems so satisfying that, in view of the experimented effectiveness of biological forces as judged by their existing social products, they are content to banish Divine plan in history and Final Causes in social evolution to that crowded limbo of discarded metaphysical figments to which naturalism and agnosticism are so

willing, not to say eager, to consign everything that savours of theism.

Nor is this attitude the monopoly of the thinkers. The popular mind, so often prone to be new-fangled over new categories, has fallen in love with the categories of biology. It sees "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest" in the competitions, rivalries and conflicts of individuals, of trades, of parties, of nations, of ideals. It echoes the voices that declare society to be "an organism," and it listens to the tales that tell it how this organism has been evolved by the sheer *vis a tergo* of natural forces. So the leaven works. Will of God and plan of providence give ground before the forces and the methods of evolution. The origin of society becomes more and more: its destiny (if it have a destiny) less and less. Human history becomes but a chapter in an infinitely larger work, and the "heaven" of bygone religions is construed as but the subjective vision of fulfilled desire. Nor is it to be in the least degree wondered at if to a generation now for some time nurtured on a diet of such ideas, the passionate theism of Mazzini should seem strained, dogmatic, superstitious, antiquated, and superfluous, and not the less so when thrust by the rhetoric of a hundred pages into the secular domain of politics. It therefore becomes of peculiar interest to inquire why Mazzini insisted that democracy, in theory as well as practice, must grapple itself to theism.

The answer to this question is two-fold. For whilst on the one hand Mazzini's theism compels him to regard democracy as part of the Divine plan, on the other his faith in democratic ideals compels him to find their justification in his theism. We may look at these two points in turn.

If we are to understand the first of these, the initial step is to realise what Mazzini meant by democracy. He certainly meant more than the word is usually supposed to mean. As a matter of fact, it means different things to different minds. To some it suggests popular rights, to others social or political equality. To not a few, and among them to thinkers of repute like John Austin and Sir Henry Maine, it means no more than a form of government.* There is much familiarity with the thing; there is little agreement upon the definition. Now it is not to Mazzini we must go in search of scientific definitions. And indeed it is the distinctive characteristic of his conception of democracy that it is impossible to compress it into a compact formula. But this at least is evident. It is to him more than a form of government. It is a far larger and a more inspiring fact. It is not that he undervalues democratic government. He is, of course, convinced that, wherever there is genuine democracy, there will also in due season be democratic government. But the two things are not identical. Democratic government is not the whole of democracy. It is but one, and among the later, of its fruits. For when democracy at last makes its way into the political constitution it is only because it has, it may be for long, existed elsewhere. For it does not reside only in polling-booths, committee-rooms and parliaments. It has its birth and growth in the awakening spirit of personal independence, in the increasing sense of human worth, in the enhanced respect of man for man, in the passion for equality, in the deepening recognition of the ties that bind the

* Maine, "Popular Government," Essay II. "It is simply and solely a form of government."

members of the commonwealth each to each. It is these things that are uppermost in Mazzini's thought when he speaks of democracy. Nor do his words leave us in any doubt upon the matter. "When all men shall commune together in reverence for the family, and respect for property, through education and the exercise of a political function in the State—the family and property, the fatherland and humanity will become more holy than they are now. When the arms of Christ, even yet stretched out on the cross, shall be loosened to clasp the whole human race in one embrace; when there shall be no more pariahs nor brahmins, nor servants, nor masters, but only men, we shall adore the great name of God with much more faith and love than we do now."* Such is Mazzini's definition of democracy "in its essentials." The inference is obvious. For if democracy be anything like this, if it is "in its essentials" a vast spiritual and social movement to which words like these are in any reasonable sense applicable, it is no longer possible, because it would forthwith become a kind of atheism, to rule it out of the Divine plan and relegate it to the rank of a secular product. To the convinced theist, and especially to the theist with strongly pantheistic leanings, it must needs become what Mazzini said it was, "a page of the world's history written by the finger of God." The language, to be sure, is something more than English politicians are accustomed to from their literary leaders. But just on that account they express, in the glow of their religious passion, the central convictions of Mazzini about democracy. It is thus his theism claims democracy for its own.

* "Thoughts upon Democracy in Europe." (Life and Writings, vol. vi. p. 110.)

We reach a similar result when we approach the matter from the other side. For it quickly becomes evident that Mazzini's faith in democratic ideals lands him in theism no less irresistibly than his theism leads to his consecration of democracy. This is not perhaps at first sight evident. For in his account of the way in which the ideals of reformers find their substance and content, he is by no means far removed from other thinkers who are not specially theistic. Like them he turns to history, and he finds there certain institutions, the family, for example, or property, which bear the stamp of permanence. It is a strong presumption in their favour. He is well aware that it is not the business of the reformer to invent all the elements of civilisation *de novo*. Nor is he ever lacking in a reverent respect for the tradition of the centuries. Yet the verdict of history alone is never final. For he is not at all minded to accept the history of the world as the judgment of the world after the fashion of some philosophers. He had too much radicalism and too deep-seated a respect for the individual conscience. Therefore it is only where the verdict of history is at one with the deliverances of the reformer's own conscience that he finds the criterion by which all institutions and all reforms of institutions must stand to be judged before they can be built into the reformer's ideal. This is his explicit declaration.* But, then, there is a further requirement: the ideal must constrain belief. It is this that matters most of all. For nothing is easier than to have ideals with but little accompany-

* "The Duties of Man," c. iii. "Whosoever that consent of Humanity corresponds with the teachings of your own conscience, you are certain of the Truth—certain, that is, of having read one line of the Law of God."

ing belief. As a matter of fact mankind, and especially political mankind, hold their ideals with all degrees of belief from the shadowy make-believe of the dreamer right up to the absolute faith of the prophet and the reformer. But it is only this last that can satisfy Mazzini. He was not a theorist writing for theorists. Far less was he a dreamer writing for dreamers. He was a reformer writing for reformers upon matters of life and death. And as such he saw with utmost clearness that every ideal that is to move the world must be held with that complete conviction in which lies the open secret of the constraining influence of ideals over the human heart, will, and conscience. It is never enough that the reformer should simply have an ideal, however well thought out. The authority of even the most imposing ideal would collapse from the moment in which whole-hearted belief began to be sapped by half-hearted doubt. For the mere content of an ideal is one thing: the faith with which it is held as summary or symbol of the things that are worth living for or dying for, is another. And it is because he realised the depths of this distinction that so many of Mazzini's pages are filled, sometimes with sorrowful references to comrades who had miserably fallen away from their early ideals, but oftener with impassioned adjurations to stand fast in the political faith. Never had man learnt more completely that lesson which De Tocqueville saw written in democracy—the lesson that "if men are to be free they must believe."*

But if this be so, a question at once emerges: How is this belief to be made secure? How is the reformer,

* "I am inclined to think that if faith be wanting in man, he must serve; and if he be free, he must believe." "Democracy in America," Part II. book i. c. v.

in dark days no less than bright, to assure himself beyond misgiving that he is pursuing substance and not shadow, realities and not illusions, in a word, ends that, outliving all failure, will be certain of achievement at last?

To this question there are manifestly many possible answers. Some reformers will simply trust their empirical forecasts, some their intuitions, some the verdict of history, while others, again, will be content to fall back upon the authority of their party or their leader. But none of these resources, nor all of them united, could satisfy the craving of Mazzini for certitude. Nothing could satisfy him short of the belief that God exists and that the will of God will be done on earth. He says this again and again. Personally he was convinced, for he has told us so in moving words, that it was this religious faith that alone enabled him to hold fast to his own ideals through the years of imprisonment, exile, slander, destitution, disillusionment which diversified his life of "rare joys and many sorrows."* He claimed no monopoly of such experiences. In his stern scheme of life they were the inevitable lot of many a reformer. And in that conviction he pled with an unwearied iteration that if democracy is to believe in its ideals it must be theistic. His pleadings are not proofs. They are impassioned declarations of articles of faith. When he appeals to the intuitions of conscience, as he does, it is because he sees in conscience a faculty capable of discerning real and permanent values—values discernible by man only because they already exist in and to the mind of God. When he appeals to the tradition of the cen-

* See "Life and Writings," vol. iii. pp. 161-175.

turies, as he does, it is only because he believes the whole course of history to be the unfolding of a Divine plan. It is not philosophy. It is faith. It is dogmatism. But it is a faith and a dogmatism into which he would have every reformer to enter if he is to hold fast to that inexpugnable belief without which ideals, no matter how magnificent their content, will neither nerve the will to daring nor sustain it in the presence of difficulty and disaster. No reader of his works would dream of calling him an orthodox believer. But his divergence from orthodox believers lies not in that he is less a believer than they, but rather that he carries his religion into his politics and his politics into religion with a passion of conviction such as the orthodox believer might well envy and imitate.

When a thinker is thus possessed by the religious spirit, we may be sure that it follows him into details. For religion like this is not merely one element among other elements in life. It is not content with a departmental influence. It works as the leaven which penetrates and pervades the whole. It is so, at any rate, in this instance, as we find when we turn from fundamentals to his treatment and estimate of the life of the individual man.

It is the irony of our modern life that, just when the individual man has, by the gospel of democracy, been aroused to the consciousness of his worth, dignity and claims, there is borne in upon him by the teachings of science the message of his extreme finite insignificance. "Be free, independent, self-assertive, and see that you be not defrauded of your rights and hopes"—so run the oracles of democracy. "Yes," rejoins the voice of science, drawing *its* oracles from the wide evolutionary outlook on Nature and History, "but do not forget

that in presence of the vastness of cosmic processes, you are a quite insignificant unit, an ephemeron, "a fly of a summer," or, in less metaphorical phrase, a perishable individual with no discoverable core of personality in you, and but one among many transitory specimens of a species which itself is transitory." One need not further labour the point, which, indeed, has become something of a commonplace.

There can be no doubt that Mazzini, though he had but slender dealings with science, felt the acuteness of this antithesis. We see this in the words he puts into the lips of the individual man as there rises before his mind the overwhelming vastness of humanity. It is not the atomist's "Every man for himself," nor the equalitarian's "I am as good as you"—upstart formulas both!—but the words with which the fisherman of Brittany puts out to sea, "Help me, my God! My boat is so small and the ocean is so wide!"

In face of this problem—a problem, be it said, that presses with a painful acuteness on all secularism which claims to be both democratic and scientific—Mazzini has two resources. One lies in the relation of the individual soul, however insignificant it may seem, to God. This was the side of Protestantism he welcomed. To him as to the men of the English Commonwealth, and also to Carlyle, the direct communion between the human spirit and the divine was the source of that individual strength, that defiant independence that comes of conscious dependence upon the Source of all life. There was no shadow of hesitancy in his teaching here. It was central to his creed that, through consciousness of participation in the very life of God, the individual could not only lift himself out of the nothingness that threatens to engulf him, but, if need

be, withstand principalities and powers to the face. The second resource lay in the principle of Association which he made it the business of his life to preach to his generation. An atomistic individualism was his abhorrence. It was the sure path to isolated impotence. For if God had made men equals, as he said a hundred times, the "equality" he had in mind was such as pointed the way to that association and mutual helpfulness which is only possible because the equal units are so diverse. Whence indeed it comes that in social life men can gain so much more than they give, flinging into the common stock their own small modicum of faculty, and drawing forth, through the organised power of association, the force and achievement of many who may have where they themselves are lacking. The perception of this made Mazzini naturally the apostle of Association in many modes; but there were two of these for which he more especially stood sponsor, the Family and the Nation.

Whenever Mazzini approaches the Family his radicalism passes into a profound and reverent conservatism. He regards it as "immortal." He says it is more imperishable even than the nation. And of all the maladies that could befall society the deadliest would be the decay of the home. It is not too much to say that for him (unlike some of the later friends of democracy*) the decline of the family would be the path to decadence. This was, of course, in part at any rate, because the family was so substantially justified of history. But it was also because he felt, with a pathetic personal conviction, that in missing this, the individual life, be its other resources what they may, runs the risk of an

* *E.g.*, C. H. Pearson in "National Life and Character," c. v. "The Decline of the Family."

irretrievable impoverishment. "He who, from some fatality of position has been unable to live the calm life of the family . . . has a shadow of sadness cast over his soul and a void in his heart which nought can fill, as I who write these pages for you know." No political thinker has written of the family with a more discerning sympathy than this exile from home as well as country. Even this, however, was far from the central consideration. For this lies in the larger, more civic conviction that the family carries in it the germ and first principle of the public affections. For it was not the family *sentiment* that was uppermost in his thought. He never hesitated to teach that fathers must part with sons and sons with fathers, be the rent ties of human affection what they may, at the call of the State. He always thought politically, so that the home was to him no mere refuge from public cares and disgusts, but—to use his own characteristic words—the place where "between the mother's kiss and the father's caress the child learns the first lesson of citizenship." Hence, as we might expect, it is the civic responsibility of the parent that is the dominant note. "In the name of all that is most sacred," so runs the adjuration, "never forget that through your children you have in charge the future generations; that towards them as souls confided to your care, towards humanity and before God, you are under the heaviest responsibility known to mankind."* The doctrine, to be sure, is not new. The same thing was said by Burke when he declared that no cold relation was a zealous citizen, and branded Rousseau as "a lover of his kind but a hater of his kindred." It is thus, with

* See "The Duties of Man," c. vi.

both writers, that the family points onward to the nation.

Very significant in Mazzini's view of the Nation is his attitude towards two groups of social reformers. The first are the earlier socialists of France who seemed to him to sit all too loose to the national life.* Intent on their own industrial problem it was their plan, as it has been the plan of most of the many communistic experiments of the United States, to detach themselves as far as possible from the larger national interests, to erect their own industrial experiments, and to leave the great tides of political life to sweep past their doors unheeded. To such as these Mazzini's antipathy was implacable. Eager to foster all reasonable forms of association, and not least industrial undertakings, it was his conviction that all such combinations are pernicious while they last and foredoomed to ultimate failure if, in a spirit of sectional selfishness, they ask their members to abjure upon the threshold the larger interests of citizenship. This runs throughout. Though he was an apostle of co-operation, though no nation could approximate to his ideal which was not rich in many modes of association, his aversion was intense towards all attempts to purchase a limited success for any form of association at the price of an enfeebled patriotism. He was interested in the economic problems that vex modern democracy, but his interest was always more than economic. It was civic and patriotic.

* "Life and Writings," vol. iv. p. 377. "On the day when you should follow the example of too many French Socialists, and separate the *social* from the *political* question, saying: We will work out our own emancipation whatever be the form of Institution by which our country is governed—that day you would have yourselves decreed the perpetuity of your own Social servitude."

Similarly with his attitude to the socialists who followed Marx, and who were so possessed by the industrial problem that they were ready to subordinate national patriotism to one great international combination of labour against capitalism. Mazzini was not without his sympathies here. He joined "The International," and characteristically did his best to enlist its members in the political movement. But when he found that they were lukewarm to national causes he grew lukewarm to them, and eventually severed his connection. It is characteristic that he seems to have been more sympathetic with the Chartist than with the Socialists. It was not from any coldness to the cause of labour. There was almost nothing which he was not willing and eager to do for the working men of Italy. And it is a touching fact that in all the misery and poverty of exile, a poverty which drove him to the last straits, he gave the evenings of his laborious days, in times long before the evening school was so much in fashion as it is now, to the teaching and befriending of the Italian waifs and strays who eked out a wretched living on the streets of London. But the thing he could not do was even to seem to justify the policy which, in asserting the claims of labour, however just and however urgent, ignored or even subordinated the prior claims of country. "Love your country," he cries, with his wonted impassioned utterance . . . "it is your name, your glory, your sign among the nations. Give to it your thoughts, your counsels, your blood. Raise it up great and beautiful as it was foretold by our great men. And see that you leave it uncontaminated by any trace of falsehood or of servitude, unprofaned by dismemberment. Let it be one as the thought of God." It was so that in

the way men call the nation he worshipped the God of his fathers. Nor is it simply this apotheosis of the nation that impresses us, not even when we read it in the light of his life-long struggle, sometimes in the garret of the conspirator, sometimes on the stricken field, for the unity of Italy; it is also the depth and fervour of the conviction that the man who, for any reason whatever, severs himself from the national traditions, the national struggles, hopes and triumphs, even from the national humiliations, thereby cuts out of his life the interests which make life most worth living, and with the recklessness of a barbarian rejects the instrument that God has put into the hands of the citizen in order that he may lift himself out of the petty round of private cares, trivialities, and even vices into the larger air of the life of the nation. For in one respect Mazzini saw eye to eye with the political thinkers of Ancient Greece. To him as to them the bane and blight of national life was faction, division, the sacrifice of unity to sectional interests. He had bitter experience of this in his own struggles for Italian unity. Nor was he himself guiltless, in the later years of his life, of fostering by his fanatical passion for an impracticable republic the very malady he strove to remedy. But it can always be pled for him with truth that even his worst failures sprang from his passion for the nation. In hating Cavour and counter-working the Italian monarchy he was but giving effect to his settled opinion that it was only as a republic that the Italian nation could stand strong in organic unity.

And yet if Mazzini thus glorified the nation more than any other writer of modern times, it was not because he stopped short at the nation as a final end

or highest unity. Quite the contrary. That development of the spirit of nationality which is content to rest in the view of the international system as essentially a struggle for survival amongst rival nations is far from him. He has been called a fanatic for nationality. Yet he was "an international man" if ever there was one. Only, his internationalism was neither, as in Cobden, the internationalism of Trade, nor, as in Marx, the internationalism of Labour. It was the internationalism in the eyes of which a nation is guilty of "the grand refusal" if it do not stand forward and take its place, to the limits of its power, in international politics. In this, and nothing short of this, lies for him the final justification of national existence. For it is not race or geographical boundaries, nor is it even traditions, language, literature, nor yet intra-national ideals, that really make a nation. It is mission. "Little I care for Rome," he once said, "if a great European initiative is not to issue from it." And his reason follows. "We cannot live without a European life." Hence his hatred of Cobdenism. Hence his vituperative vocabulary for non-intervention: "cowardly desertion of duty," "negation of all belief," "political atheism," "the word of Cain." Hence his exhortations to the United States (in 1854) to play its part in world politics. Hence his own passionate sympathies with Poland and the Balkan States, sympathies which he was always ready, nay greedy, to translate into action. In this sense it was Europe, not Italy alone, that was his country.

It is not only Cobdenites who will refuse to follow him here. All radicals who are prone to see in an "active foreign policy" paralysis of social reform and increased burdens on the poor will look with suspicion

on the doctrine. Nor is it to be denied that, as coming from a man who united to a deep distrust of diplomacy the conviction that the existing boundaries of European states needed drastic rectification, Mazzini's doctrine of national mission is heavily freighted with war. He was never averse in his own career to rush to the arbitrament of arms. He was prepared to pay the price, if only war meant mission. But even those who may doubt the wisdom of this preaching of a latter-day crusade must, in ordinary fairness, do justice to the grounds upon which it rested. Partly it was the perception that a great nation cannot even if it would, at any rate in Europe, sit loose to international relations ; partly the equalitarian conviction that the citizen who believes all men to have worth in the eye of God, cannot abruptly arrest his practical sympathies at the national frontier. "Say not the language we speak is different. Acts, tears, and martyrdom, are a language common to all men and which all can understand." But chiefly it was the faith, integral to his religious and political creed, that the organised nation, and never so much as when it is a democracy, becomes the most effective of all instruments for working out the providential plan among the nations of the world. Most people think of Mazzini as the apostle of Italian unity. But, on his own avowal, he could never have spent his years for Italy had he not believed in the day when free and unified Italy would stand pre-eminent among the nations as, when need arose, the armed champion of struggling or trampled freedom in all lands. It was not the spirit of the filibuster nor was it any mere passion for national glory and aggrandisement that drove him on. It was the peculiar cast of his political religion, which un-

hesitatingly laid upon the nation in its service of humanity the same spirit of political duty which from first to last he enjoined upon the individual citizen.

It will hardly be denied that this forcible doctrine raises one of the gravest practical problems with which modern democracy has to deal, and upon which the citizen is bound to come to some decision. The reality of international duties is no mere academic speculation. It is a recognised fact. That same consciousness of the worth and claims of the individual which within the nation has clothed the citizen in civil and political rights and freed the slave has gone far further afield. It has sent forth the many missions of many churches. It has founded aborigines protection societies and championed the cause of native races. It has begotten the spirit that cannot sit still in presence of the spectacle of what it takes to be wrong, injustice, and atrocity done in other lands. This being so, the question from which there is no escape is, How are these cosmopolitan duties to be carried from the region of conviction and sentiment into the world of actuality and fact ? To which of the voices is the citizen of the coming years to listen ? Is it to the voice of Cobden, unsparing in its denunciations of war and armaments, eloquent for the bloodless victories of commerce, strong in its confident plea for peaceful national example ? Or is it to the voice of Mazzini which, in the name of the brotherhood of men and the providence of God, pled with passionate democratic conviction for the stern duty of armed intervention for the undoing of despotism and the succour of struggling freedom in all lands ?

And yet this issue, grave as it is, is after all subordinate to the larger question, if it indeed be true

that democracy must be religious or fail. No one can venture to say that Mazzini has proved that it must. It is not for any man to say what forms democracy may assume in the vicissitudes through which it may have to pass. But one thing at least Mazzini has proved. In life and in writings, and in life perhaps more convincingly than in writings, he has shown that the democratic spirit can, by alliance with religion, achieve results which none of its friends can afford to hold light. One of these is the belief in the reality of distant and still unachieved ends which is at once the strength and the solace of the reformer. Another is that personal faithfulness to political duties which is only too apt to be frittered away through indifference when political power is broken up into minute fragments and portioned out to the multitude in wide democratic franchises. A third is the defiant individual spirit, drawn from conscious dependence upon a Divine support, which nerves the citizen to resist the tyranny alike of despotism and of democracy. And still another is the eye to see steadily behind all the more immediate ends of political struggle, with their preoccupying secularities, the lives and destinies of men who are worth working for because even the least of them is regarded as having in him something of the spirit of God. These are the things which Mazzini valued. For him they were of the essence of democracy. His results, of course, rested upon large religious assumptions. And beyond a doubt there are radicals who would be equally willing to take the results and reject the religion on which they rest. It is for them to show how such a course is possible. If they can, it is safe to say that it will only be by traversing Mazzini's democratic gospel from end to end.

THOMAS HILL GREEN

THE POLITICAL IDEALISM OF THOMAS HILL GREEN

BENTHAM reviled Oxford. Neither he nor his disciples expected any good thing to come out of it, least of all anything radical. But time has its ironies. For Oxford it was reserved to find (as some at any rate think) a more adequate philosophy than Bentham's for that democratic citizenship of which Bentham was the prophet.

Bentham's philosophy was a fighting philosophy. When it was given to the world democracy was still an aspiration and a struggle. What democracy needed was a rallying cry rather than a reasoned justification. It found that in Bentham. The paramountcy of public good, the iniquity of monopoly, the deposition of privileged incapacity, the exactation of responsibility to the last tittle from all persons in authority—these were things which struggling radicalism needed, and it was partly at any rate because it found them in Benthamism that it fought its battle so well. But time had passed. Democracy had won. The franchise had been twice extended in 1832 and 1867. It was shortly to be still further widened in 1884. New and virile classes and interests had been admitted to power. Municipal self-government had been inaugurated and had begun to run its long and fruitful course. Religious disabilities had been done away. The poor law had been reformed. Free Trade had been carried. Social amelioration had

begun in Factory legislation. National education was, at last, coming to the front. In a word, democratic citizenship had become a fact. It had its instrument in popular government: it had its objective in a larger, a fuller, a more concrete ideal of the public good than was possible for the men of the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

It was then, roughly speaking, in the sixties (he was born in 1836) that Green came upon the scene. It was when democratic citizenship had become, actually and potentially, a recognised fact of the first magnitude, when it had passed from struggle to success, from aspiration to fruition, that Green, then an Oxford tutor little known, if at all, beyond his University, began to propound his civic idealism, thereby bringing to citizenship a new dignity and elevation, and, it may be added, fresh grounds of confidence and hope. The political philosophy of Bentham at the beginning of the nineteenth century was still a prophecy: the civic idealism of Green towards the end of the century was the justification of a prophecy fulfilled.

This was a service to his country which Green was peculiarly fitted to render. Political in proclivity even from his school days, the sense of public duty was in him. It grew with his growth. It became central in his character and thought. It fed upon what it found: upon his admirations of statesmen like Vane and Cromwell in the past, like John Bright in the present; upon the heritage of the civic spirit of the ancient world as he found it in his study of Greek history and in the perennial fountain-heads of Plato and Aristotle, in whom so much of his work as an Oxford tutor lay: not least upon the resolute discharge of civic duty in Oxford, both as the first College tutor who sat in the city

Council and otherwise. But above all it came—as befits a thinker—as the application of the philosophical idealism which he held with the restrained but intense passion of a religious faith.

Not that one would suggest that this philosophical idealism came to him after the fashion in which a great religious conception sometimes seizes and holds the mind. He was far different from Mazzini. He was a man of analysis not of intuitions. His philosophy came to him neither by flashes of insight nor by eclectic borrowing from other minds. He thought it out with a laborious tenacity, and always, but especially as the years went on, he was cautious of putting his foot down. But when he put it down he planted it firmly. "He always created the impression," says his biographer,* "of one who had his feet upon the ground." Nor can there be any doubt that the right word for his philosophy is idealism.

Green's idealism, however, is not what many persons suppose idealism to be, and what, in minds with less respect for experience, it sometimes becomes. Idealism is often supposed to be the type of thought that stands for the reality of an ideal world other than this actual world of human life and experience. It is supposed to see visions and dream dreams. It is believed to regard facts with an unbecoming disrespect, and even (somehow) to have convinced itself that matter does not exist. And indeed it sometimes itself, as in the idealism of Plato or Carlyle, assumes the inverted form that turns round upon the actual world only to belittle it for its "despicable actualities." There is nothing of this in the

* See the Memoir by R. L. Nettleship in vol. iii. of Green's works. This Memoir, which contains a singularly lucid and interesting summary of Green's teaching, is published separately by Longmans & Co.

idealism of Green. "No man," says Nettleship, "was ever less of a visionary." Has he not said it himself? "Not the admission of an ideal world of guess and aspiration alongside of the empirical, but the recognition of the empirical itself as ideal"—such is his account of what idealism is; "that only valid idealism," as he elsewhere says, "which trusts not to a guess about what is beyond experience, but an analysis of what is within it."* His own idealism illustrates this definition. It is not content with affirming the reality of those spiritual forces we call ideas, for visionaries have never failed in that. It insists also that ideas are the very stuff and substance of experience, and that they are to be found, if ever, *in the facts*, be they the phenomena of Nature or of human life. To Green, as to Aristotle, it is the concrete actualities of experience that are real. But, then, to him as to his great Greek forerunner, with whom he has so much in common, the concrete fact is real because it is spiritual.

It was idealism of this kind that Green applied to politics. It harmonised with his strongly concrete human sympathies. It joined hands with his readiness to recognise the worth of actual men and actual institutions. It chimed in with his instinctive respect for the ordinary good neighbour and honest citizen. It emboldened him to believe in respectability. And it did all this (as we shall more fully see in the sequel) because it led him to discern in his fellow citizens as in his country's institutions, the vehicles of ideas, the organs of spiritual forces. This is what he believed he could prove, and it is in this belief that we have his distinctive characteristic. Many writers of the century—

* "Works," i. p. 449.

Carlyle, Emerson, Mazzini, Ruskin, Tennyson—had borne witness to the reality of spiritual forces. Many had paid their tribute to the significance of institutions, and to the worth and dignity of the individual man. And some, of whom Mazzini was one, had done their best to draw these two things together and thereby to spiritualise the so-called secularities of politics. Green's peculiar merit was *to furnish proof*—proof that all that makes for freedom and progress in the lives of citizens comes from the presence to them and in them of ideas. There is a striking passage in the end of his luminous lectures on the English Commonwealth upon Sir Harry Vane, whose lofty political mysticism had evidently a strong fascination for him.

“The enthusiasm of Vane,” he there writes, “died that it might rise again. It was sown in the weakness of feeling that it might be raised in the intellectual comprehension which is power. ‘The people of England,’ he said on the scaffold, ‘have been long asleep. I doubt they will be hungry when they awake.’ They have slept, we may say, another two hundred years. If they should yet awake and be hungry, they will find their food in the ideas which, with much blindness and weakness, he vainly offered them, *cleared and ripened by a philosophy of which he did not dream.*”* The philosophy Green here referred to was undoubtedly that of Hegel. But the words are not truer of Hegel than of himself. “The professed object of Hegel’s philosophy,” he once said, was to find “formulæ adequate to the action of reason as exhibited in nature and human life, in art and religion.” Hegel’s object was his object. To find reason in human society,

* “Works,” iii. p. 364.

to show that the life of citizenship was in its essence a reasonable life, reasonable in its respect for institutions and accomplished facts, reasonable also in its sanguine hopes, aspirations and ideals—this was the central purpose and sober passion of his life.

This being so, the problem that Green presents to the reader is manifest. The empirical fact that lay before him (as it lies before us) was democratic citizenship, and our prime concern is to see if we can follow him in the conviction that an examination of this fact really does justify the contention that civic duty, rightly regarded, is nothing less than a spiritual function, or, if we prefer so to phrase it, that the life of citizenship is a mode of divine service. Nor need one hesitate to repeat, that though no man ever shrank more from high-sounding professions, or laid less claim for himself to loftier motives than actuated his neighbours, Green carried the spirit of religious devotion into his politics.

It may safely be affirmed that a view like this is not common in democratic circles. It may seem to savour of extravagance thus to claim the "secular" for the spiritual. For the secularities of politics are manifest. They are only too much with us. Who is the politician who does not know the parties and programmes, the caucuses, committee-rooms, polling booths, the compromises, expediences, trickeries? And is it of this thing that one can venture to speak in terms of religion or of a spiritual philosophy! Yet, if we follow Green, we must. For though it may be admitted that Green, always prone to choose words well within the limits of his convictions, might not have expressed himself in such terms as have been used above, there can be no doubt that he stands or falls

by the doctrine that the political life of men and nations is a spiritual revelation, and not less so, but more when it becomes democratic

Green's radicalism—for radicalism it is—contrasts in many points with that of the earlier radical thinkers, whether these be the utilitarians or the apostles of the Rights of man, and in nothing more decisively than in his frank and full recognition of the force of circumstances. One of his earliest essays was upon "the force of circumstances," and its whole purport is to show how even the genius or the hero, however masterful his inspirations, however strong his will, must sooner or later reckon with this force of circumstances. The strong man may, by force of will, transmute circumstances. But he must not, he cannot, ignore them. If he does, his will must dash itself in vain against inexorable limits. Green illustrates this in those notable lectures on the English Commonwealth. They begin with a criticism of Carlyle, on the ground that Carlyle does imperfect justice to the solidity of the forces with which Cromwell and the Puritans had to contend, and they go on to trace the cause of the brevity of the success of the political heroes of that great popular movement. One can see in every line that Green is profoundly in sympathy with the men. Their ideal of a religious citizenship was his own. He declares the Cromwellian protectorate to have been "the great spring of (subsequent) political life in England." He asserts that the spirit of Independency which inspired Vane has "more than any other ennobled the plebeian elements of English life." To the sincerity, the patriotism, the nobility of aim, the religious inspiration, the iron will of these Puritans, he pays unstinted tribute. But he

is no less firm in pointing out how even the strongest of them failed because in their enthusiasms and ecstasies, their mysticisms and fanaticisms, they ignored or underestimated the conditions under which their work had to be done ; in other words, because they refused to come to terms with the traditions, the habits, the common feelings and interests, even the prejudices which stood rooted in the national character. They would fain have done in a few years what, as in the light of the sequel we know right well, it needed centuries to accomplish. Nor was theirs an unique experience. It was but one illustration of the perennial tragedy of life which comes of the inevitable "conflict between the creative will of man and the hidden wisdom of the world which seems to thwart it."* "The higher enthusiasm," he says in a pregnant passage, "which breathed in Cromwell and Vane was not puritanic or English merely. It belonged to the universal spiritual force which as ecstasy, mysticism, quietism, philosophy, is in permanent collision with the carnal interests of the world, and which, if it conquers them for a moment, yet again sinks under them that it may transmute them more thoroughly to its service."†

It is worth while to dwell at some length on Green's interpretation of the Commonwealth. For, as Nettleship well says, these four lectures bring out the whole man. Green was a reformer and a lover of reformers : he was a radical and an admirer of radicals. But, as one of his contemporaries said, he was "a radical of a very peculiar kind." He was, at any rate, far enough from subversive. For from first to last he held two

* "Works," vol. iii. p. 278.

† *Ibid.* p. 364.

convictions for which we do not usually go to the oracles of Radicalism. One is, that he who would reform the institutions of his country must qualify himself for the task by opening his eyes to "the force of circumstances," the other, that no reform, however triumphant for the time it may appear, and even when backed up by men of heroic mould, is likely to endure if it has not come to terms with the national sentiment, character and institutions.

There are some ardent spirits to whom a doctrine like this is far from welcome. They do not like to be reminded that there are limits before which reformers must bend, or against which they must dash themselves in vain. They prefer the note of earlier radicalism—the radicalism of the Revolution or of the Utilitarian crusade with its confident faith in new beginnings, swift political transformations, legislative short-cuts to happiness, and the rapid realisability of ideals. And some do not hesitate to say of Green, as some have said of Hegel, that his political doctrine plays into the hands of reaction by damping the fires of reform, and providing conservatives with convenient apologies for inveterate abuses. But it is entirely possible for a philosophy to be radical without ceasing to be conservative. Were this not so it would at any rate be a misnomer to call Green's teaching radical. For in certain aspects Green is profoundly conservative. Not only did he preach "the force of circumstances"; it is within the truth to say that the subversion or even the shaking of institutions is the last thing he would have desired. The "return to Nature" of Rousseau and the revolutionists was in his eyes a reversion to barbarism. It was the watchword of men fatally blind to the resources of

civilisation that lay ready to their hand ; and it was doubly to be distrusted because it glorified sentiment and depreciated reason.* His own attitude to the social system is fundamentally different. It is not a spirit of antipathy or even of discontent. It can only be called a spirit of profound gratitude. Words can hardly be stronger than those in which he extols the heritage into which the citizen of a civilised State is born.

“ In great books and great examples, in the gathering fullness of spiritual utterance which we trace through the history of literature, in the self-denying love which we have known from the cradle, in the moralising influences of civil life, in the closer fellowship of the Christian society, in the sacramental ordinances which represent that fellowship, in common worship, in the message of the preacher through which, amid diversity of stammering tongues, one spirit still speaks—here God’s sunshine is shed abroad without us.” †

Nor must we suppose that this glowing and grateful appreciation of what life, even with all its obstructive imperfections, has to give, rests merely upon a perception of the recognised value of such things as are enumerated in this passage. For it is time now to go to the root of the matter, and to say that analysis of experience, both on the lesser scale of individual morality and on the larger scale of national history, had convinced Green that moral and political institutions were more than the resultants of secular forces. Behind them and within them he discerned, and he claimed this as result of analysis, a universal

* See the Essay, “Popular Philosophy in Relation to Life,” “Works,” vol. iii. pp. 113–117.

† *Ibid.* p. 248.

spiritual force, a divine idea, an eternal consciousness. For even if, on a first view of it, the course of history might seem to be no more than the secular product of finite human wills and circumstances, it was precisely his analysis of the action of human wills as found in moral and political experience that convinced Green that neither human achievement nor aspiration could be made intelligible except through the presence in so-called secular affairs of that universal spiritual force to which the religious consciousness had never failed to bear witness. For it is not simply because institutions are the work of many hands and many minds which wrought their best in the generations that are gone, that the social system into which we come is entitled to our respect. It is also and ultimately for the deeper reason that it is the work of men who in all they thought, did and endured, were ultimately dependent, even when they might be but dimly or not at all conscious of the fact, upon that supreme source of all life which in the philosophy of Green appears variously as the divine idea, the universal spiritual force, the spiritual principle in nature and life, the eternal consciousness. The dependence of man on God is (as he thinks) a fundamental fact of human experience.

Hence that passage in which, in repudiation of the notion that either the world of Nature or the given social system is ultimately hostile and obstructive to human will and aspiration, he speaks of the so-called "outer world" as a means "through which the deity who works unseen behind it, pours the truth and love which transform man's capabilities into actualities." * It is so that the very force of circumstances which may

* "Works," vol. iii. p. 4. Essay on "The Force of Circumstances."

seem to thwart and resist the passion for a better life, can, on a deeper insight, be recognised as the material which, in the divine plan, has to be transmuted to the service of higher ends. And hence that other passage in which he vindicates in noble words the actual social achievement of mankind. "Everything," he there writes, "that makes life human, the institutions by which

'relations dear

And all the charities of husband, son,
And brother first were known ;'

which create honour and dishonour, loyalty and disloyalty, justice and injustice ; which make it possible to die for one's country or to be false to it, to sacrifice oneself to a cause or a cause to oneself, to defraud the fatherless and widow or befriend them—all these the animals know not. They are not primary but derived, not given by nature but constituted by man."* And when he says they are constituted by man, he is not thinking of man as a being who can find nothing in the universe higher than himself. It is always of man as, even in the insignificance of his finitude, participant in a universal spirit which works within him, and is thereby rendered capable of social achievements which in permanence and value far surpass his conscious purposes or plans. "Perhaps," he says, in a sentence in which the "perhaps" introduces what was with him a settled conviction, "on thinking the matter out, we should find ourselves compelled to regard the idea of social good as a communication to the human consciousness, a consciousness developing itself in time, from an eternally complete consciousness."† Nor does he lack

* "Works," vol. iii. p. 112.

† "Principles of Political Obligation," section 131.

the full courage of his convictions here. He sees the difficulties and goes to meet them. He knows well the ferocious and greedy and selfish passions in which the existing social system has had its origin—the earth-hunger of conquering hordes, the passions of military despots, the pride, avarice, vindictiveness of kings, the lust for pleasure, the greed for gain. He minimises none of them. He meets them by the contention that, on a closer examination, even these things may be said (he adopts the phrase) to be “overruled for good.” For, as he reads the record, even the most selfish passions that operate in the history of social evolution, however they may stain the characters of those who felt them, become in their own despite the ministers and instruments of social impulses and ideas which make for better things. Napoleon (to take his leading instance) may have been possessed by a personal passion for glory, but the selfish passion nevertheless identified itself with the aggrandisement of his country. Cæsar, when he crossed the Rubicon, may have thought first and thought last of victory and power, but he founded the Empire, and the Empire brought to Europe the blessings of Roman Law. This is the line of thought that Green follows throughout.* He never dreams of disputing the part that selfish passions play in the evolution of institutions. He was not blind to facts. If we call him optimist at all, it must be with the reservation that his optimism was anything rather than easy or light-hearted. Yet behind all the selfish passions which darken the course of history, his analysis disclosed to him two other things which he grasped with characteristic tenacity. The one was the

* “Political Obligation,” sections 127–131.

steady trend of all communities, from the family onwards, towards higher conceptions of a public good, the other, the immanence in this whole forward-struggling movement of that "eternal consciousness" which was his philosophical synonym for God.

On occasion Green goes further even than this. For there are times when this conviction of the dependence of finite human wills upon the infinite spirit leads him, as it is apt to lead all profoundly religious minds, close up to the borders of a resigned optimism which might seem (it is only seeming in this case) the utmost antithesis of the radical passion for reform. This is so where he urges that there is room even in the genius and the reformer for "a wise passiveness to the heavenly influences which are ever about him." It is so still more when he is delineating the true attitude of the religious mind towards the work and the workers of the world amongst whom a man's lot is cast.

"The least experienced among us," he says in one of his occasional religious addresses, "knows that it is not in the outward cast of a life, but in the way of living it that the spirit of a man is shown, and that there are those about him in whose characters, though with no outward mark of distinction, and perhaps under a surface of yet unconquered weaknesses, the love of God and the brethren is the ruling power. All he has to do is to share in the higher spirit of such men. He need not make a rush after the heroic, or seek to jump out of his circumstances. The end to be attained is indeed infinite; but he need not, therefore vainly try to swell his own effort to a like infinity, for it is already attained for him. The sacrifice has been offered, the goal has been won. God is for ever perfect light and love. It is for us, under the limitations of a petty

human life, to take such personal hold on this perfection as may fit us for its fuller communication when, in his good time, these limitations are taken away."*

These, it must be confessed, do not read like the words of a radical. They are more akin to quietism than to radicalism ; and they may serve admirably to accentuate the remark already quoted that Green's radicalism was of a peculiar kind—so peculiar, some may think, as to cease to be radicalism at all in any reasonable acceptation of that word. Green used to advise his pupils to read Burke. And, so far as we have gone, it might seem that, in the profoundly religious complexion of his thought, in his respect for the work of those who have gone before, and in his reverent appreciation of existing social and political institutions, there is more of conservative Burke than of radical Bentham in his philosophy.

This, however, would be a flagrant misconception. For if the course of history and the growth of institutions be thus the revelation of a spiritual principle which uses men and societies of men as to its organs, this is not a fact to be sought for only in the past. The revelation is not over and done with. Why should it ? Rather is it as the years roll on increasing in fullness and in clearness. With the deepening of political thought, with the growth of political institutions, with the increase of the volume of national life, it is a greater thing for the citizen of to-day than it ever was to his forerunners. Who will say that it will not be greater far in the days to come ? Green, it is true, was no believer in special revelations of the

* "Works," vol. iii. p. 246, in Address entitled "The Witness of God."

Divine. But it was because he held that there is a progressive revelation for ever going on, to which no final limits can be set.

For there is nothing against which in all his writings he more vehemently protests than the notion that in these latter days we are somehow shut out from the perennial spiritual influences which he believed to be written, if only men have eyes to see, upon the whole course of moral and political evolution. The essential dependence of the human will on its divine source, the constant presence of a universal spiritual principle in human life is the core of his entire ethical and political thought. It is this that has made his teaching, despite its heterodoxy (which is pronounced enough), welcome to many leaders of the religious world ; as it also makes it easy for himself (and it is a strongly marked characteristic) to pass from the language of metaphysics into the more familiar phrases of the religious consciousness :—

“ Say not in thine own heart who shall ascend into heaven or descend into the deep to find God in the height of another world or in the depths of Nature. ‘ The word of God is very nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.’ It is the word that has been made man, that has been uttering itself in all the high endeavour, the long-suffering love, the devoted search for truth, which have so far moralised mankind, and that now speaks in your conscience. It is the God in you which strives for communication with God.

“ Speak to Him thou for He hears and spirit with spirit can meet,
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

Not as to the sensual ear, nor necessarily through the stinted expression of verbal signs, but as a man

communes with his own heart, you may speak to God." *

These words, which come in a religious address, are used with reference to the moral which is also the religious life of individuals. But their application does not end there. Being a thinker, Green was not the man to carry one set of fundamental conceptions into one domain and shut them out from another. The same conscious dependence upon a universal spiritual Source which is the strength of the personal will is the strength likewise of the political reformer. It was the strength of the heroes of the Commonwealth. It may be the strength and inspiration also of the reformer of all ages, even though he may not (like Cromwell and his followers) clothe his aspirations in biblical language, or in the terms of evangelical theology. For it is precisely through this conscious dependence upon a universal spirit that there comes into human life that element in which lies the nerve of all progress. That element is *the presence and everlasting vitality of ideals*.

Let all who would understand Green banish at once from their minds the notion that a political ideal is no more than a subjective dream or aspiration in the very fashioning of which the mind loses touch with reality and passes into the shadowy land of phantasy. To frame ideals Green believes to be of the essence of man's nature. We find this if we analyse the will. For from first to last will, even from its beginnings in instinct and desire, is a faculty of ideals. Always it sets some kind of ideal before it. The ideal may be nothing more than a decent family life or a forecast of less squalid surroundings. Or it

* "Works," vol. iii. p. 272. Address on "Faith."

may be the splendid visions of the reformers and prophets of the world. Or it may be one or other of the manifold plans, schemes or prophecies of social betterment that lie between these two extremes. But some ideal there always is. The entire second Book of the "Prolegomena to Ethics" is written to prove that reason is—and he is never weary of repeating it—"constitutive" of motive, and that the way in which it becomes so is by transmuting what otherwise would be blind animal appetites into desires for ends—ends which are always, even in their lowliest phases, ideal. This psychological analysis of will finds confirmation in biography and history. Be it the savage tribesman or the civilised citizen, be it the leader of men or his humblest follower, the service of ideals lofty or lowly is common to all. And this is a fact they can no more disclaim than they can abjure the idealising reason and imagination which lift them above the brute. And wherever present, an ideal acts in the same way. It creates that pregnant contrast between the ideal and the actual, it begets that antithetic thought "This is what we ought to be—This is what we are," whereby mankind have been throughout all the ages plunged into a saving discontent, shaken out of an ignoble lethargy and lotus-eating, and nerved for reform. Mixed with illusions our ideals may be, and even with fatuities. We may smile at times to think of them in retrospect. But let no one think that they are therefore shadows. Whatever they may become to dreamers, they are to all men of action, whether they be thinking of the betterment of family or parish, of city or of nation, nothing less than the efforts of the human spirit to apprehend that greater and more satisfying reality after which all finite spirits for ever strive.

They are attempts to express in thought and imagery finite anticipations of that reality which will one day be matter of actual experience—in that far-off day, namely, when, thanks to human courage and pertinacity, the Divine Idea, the universal spiritual force in which all that lives participates, shall have found a fuller revelation in social institutions and in the souls of men than it has hitherto found in the imperfect state of existing human affairs. In this aspect an ideal is not only a loftier thing, it is also a thing more real than is actual human life. “To anyone who understands a process of development,” says Green, in a pregnant sentence, “the result being developed is the reality.”* Apply this sweeping formula politically and we have the deeply significant doctrine that the potencies which are already here and now struggling, alike in individual and national life, for fuller expression, and ever and anon, as in men of the type of Vane or Mazzini, bursting out into mysticism, fanaticism, and revolution, point onwards with no uncertain finger to the reality of an end which, though it can only be realised after many days and never in all its fulness, yet reveals at every fresh step in its actualisation how meagre and unreal by comparison are the earlier stages, in the light of the fruition of the later. For development is more than change: it implies direction. And though the process is always costly, though as it runs its course much is lost that never comes again, yet the trend is persistently such that at any given stage a nation cannot, any more than an individual, wish that the shadow on the dial should go backward. It cannot because its citizens are conscious that each

* “Works,” vol. iii. p. 224,

step onwards makes its life more real because richer in the essential elements of national existence. They may pay their tribute to the past. They may even lament the disappearance of the days that are no more. But they cannot really desire to return to them because they know that retrogression would mean impoverishment of life. Hence the significance of Green's remark. For his words carry nothing less than a salutary inversion of the relation between the ideal and the actual as this is popularly conceived. It follows from them that the hours in which a man is holding fast to his ideal become the hours in which his grasp of reality is at its strongest, and that the hours in which he suffers his ideal to be obscured by the illusions of the present are the hours when his grasp of reality is weakest. Nor is it possible to do justice to the reality of the reformers' ideals till full recognition is accorded to this fact.

For this is the paradox of human life. We find the ideal in experience or not at all. Where else can we find it? What other revelations are there but the revelations of experience? Yes, we find the ideal in experience; and yet we recognise it as more real than any or all of the particular experiences in which we find it. Yet the paradox is no mystery. When we see a common man living and working for what he means his boys and girls to become long after he has passed from their midst, or a citizen whose most cherished hopes, whose best energies are directed upon distant political or social ends, whose full fruition he shall never see, or a soldier whose life is freely rendered up for his country's cause, or a leader (like Mazzini) who persists without faltering in the face of seemingly

irretrievable disaster—it is reasonable to regard these things as evidence that individual human lives are borne along and upheld by a spirit that is working towards results far greater and more truly real than anything that has as yet been reflected in the small mirror of actual human achievement. The very magnitude of dutiful demand which this spirit makes upon individual wills, and the entire willingness with which the citizen responds even to the most arduous of the demands laid upon him, unite to suggest that the ideals which with inexhaustible vitality shape themselves in finite imaginations, are nothing less than attempts to give form and a body to that infinite spirit through whose indwelling energy the generations of mankind are swept along towards the realisation of ends greater than they know.

It is thus at any rate that Green regards ideals. Never are they to him mere forecasts, guesses, gropings, projected by human imagination upon the darkness of the future. They would be better described as revelations to human reason and imagination of that larger spiritual life in which every son of man participates, and in which every thinking man may know that he participates.* For there are, according to Green, three great revelations of Reality ; the revelation through science, the revelation through creative art, the revelation through human action and especially through that service of ideals by which life and history are made. One may not say that Green thought the last to be the greatest of the three. But it was not the least. "To one who is full of sympathy with his fellow men," he says "the most welcome manifestation

* Cf. above, p. 200.

(of the Divine Idea) would be the political life of mankind." *

We are now perhaps in a position to understand why it is that there are two sides to Green's political doctrine. In one aspect, as we have seen, he is conservative. *Tabula rasa* and new beginnings have no charm for him. He neither vilifies the past nor belittles the present. And, on this side, he parts company for ever with Godwin and Paine and Bentham and all their following who, through lamentable limitation, wrote as if sympathy with their country's past history were treachery to the radical cause and respect for existing institutions, an admission that the reformer's occupation was gone. How could it be otherwise with a man to whom the political life of mankind was a revelation of the Divine Idea? But, then, there is the other side. For that overflowing gratitude for what the past has done for us, that readiness to do justice to our social heritage as citizens of an ancient commonwealth, that respect for existing institutions as the fruits of long experience, even that philosophic conviction that all our noisy years are but moments in an infinitely larger Life—these things hang no weight upon Green's aspirations for the future. They have the contrary effect. They inspire him with new hopes. To his large outlook they become the first fruits and earnest of better things to come. To him they are experiential proof of the presence and power in human affairs of the one everlasting spiritual principle which still speaks, and will never cease to speak, not only in the lives of the prophet and the reformer, but in the unobtrusive civic patriotism of the humblest of their followers.

These two sides of Green's political thought met in his own political life. Sober-mindedness was of the essence of his character. He had a large toleration for men and institutions. "No one was less of a visionary." The "rush after the heroic," the leap out of one's circumstances, was to him no necessary condition of good citizenship. "There is no other genuine enthusiasm of humanity," he once wrote when pleading for the reasonableness of respectability, "than one which has travelled the common highway of reason, the life of the good neighbour and honest citizen, and can never forget that it is still only on a further stage of the same journey."* Yet there were times when that passion for the ideal, that rational faith in the future which was always burning within him, broke through the limits of utterance within which, in the interests of sober practicality and from an instinctive shrinking from all large and loud professions, it was ordinarily content to be confined. With all his firm grip on fact (as one of his friends remarks), "he had the enthusiastic movement of the world's poetry in him."

One instance of this may be found in the end of the essay on "The value and influence of works of fiction." He has been lamenting that modern fiction shows a grievous declension of the spirit of creative art. It is a popular form of literature, and in becoming such it has descended to a delineation of life in which the higher intellect can find no satisfaction comparable with what is furnished by the epic and the drama. Yet he will not believe this is permanent. He cannot think that the popularisation of ideas can permanently mean their degradation. And so he goes on:—

* This is "the practical lesson" that emerges at end of his criticism of Hume. See Introduction to Hume.

“ Yet we hold fast to the faith that the ‘ cultivation of the masses,’ which has for the present superseded the development of the individual, will in its maturity produce some higher type of individual manhood than any which the old world has known. We may rest in the same faith in tracing the history of literature. In the novel we must admit that the creative faculty has taken a lower form than it held in the epic and the tragedy. But, since in this form it acts on more extensive material and reaches more men, we may well believe that this temporary declension is preparatory to some higher development, when the poet shall idealise life without making abstraction of any of its elements, and when the secret of existence, which he now speaks to the inward ear of a few, will be proclaimed on the housetops to the common intelligence of mankind.”

A second instance occurs, significantly enough, in the end of his address on the occasion of the opening of the Oxford High School for boys, the institution which, next perhaps to his college, lay near to his heart. “ Our high school, then,” he said, “ may fairly claim to be helping forward the time when every Oxford citizen will have open to him at least the precious companionship of the best books in his own language, and the knowledge necessary to make him independent; when all who have a special taste for learning will have open to them what has hitherto been unpleasantly called the ‘ education of gentlemen.’ I confess to hoping for a time when that phrase will have lost its meaning, because the sort of education which alone makes the gentleman in any true sense will be within the reach of all. As it was the aspiration of Moses that all the Lord’s people should be prophets, so with

all seriousness and reverence we may hope and pray for a condition of English society in which all honest citizens will recognise themselves and be recognised by each other as gentlemen."

No one is likely to deny that these aspirations are worthy of radicalism at its best. The misgiving in some minds may rather be lest radicalism may not prove itself worthy of them. It is therefore natural to ask what the reasons of this sober-minded thinker were for his serious belief in the coming of a day when such things would be possible. And this question will best be answered by examining somewhat more closely what Green's political ideal was, and more especially why it was so uncompromisingly democratic.

It is not necessary here to enter greatly into details. These belong rather to Green's political programme than to his political ideal. And, in any case there is nothing in the details that strikes one as distinctive of Green more than of some other radicals of his day. Bright appears to have been the politician of his time whom he most admired. He admired him, Nettleship tells us, for "his belief in the moral responsibility of nations, his love of the people, his unclerical piety, the noble simplicity and restrained passion of his eloquence." And one of his friends, while expressing the opinion that it was not likely that either Bright or Cobden could understand "the process by which Green's opinions were obtained nor the arguments by which they were defended," has remarked that almost all his definite opinions might be endorsed by Bright and Cobden. This is true. A conviction that there were hardships and wrongs to be redressed, a strong sympathy with the middle classes and the working men, a

frank acceptance of free trade, a respect for Non-conformity, a dislike of ecclesiasticism, a belief in parliamentary reform, land-law reform and national education, in Irish land acts and Irish Church disestablishment—they are all found in Green. So is a deep sympathetic interest in American democracy. Not least, there is a decided distrust of the kind of foreign policy associated with the names of Palmerston and Disraeli. “Let the flag of England,” he once wrote (in an early essay that has not survived), “be dragged through the mud rather than that sixpence be added to the taxes which weigh on the poor.” The outburst is startling, and to estimate it aright one would need to remember the precise juncture in politics that provoked it.* Nor would it be fair to press an utterance penned for the unguarded controversies of a private Essay Society. It did not, at any rate, prevent him from taking Cromwell as one of his heroes or of approving the armed coercion of South by North in the American struggle, the fortunes of which, we are told, he followed with the “ardour of a citizen-soldier and the prescience of a strategist.” Yet it remains significant of a peculiar detestation of war and of a conviction (he labours at much length to prove it in his latest work) that war always implies culpability somewhere,† in which he is not surpassed by either of the twin leaders of the Manchester School.

The point of distinctive interest therefore in regard to Green’s ideal is not the details but rather those larger features of it, *not* to be found in Bright or

* It was in 1860 when Bright had given utterance to his well-known “*Perish Savoy.*”

† “*Political Obligation,*” div. K. “The right of the State over the individual in war.”

Cobden, upon which the details, the common property of many radicals, will be found to depend.

Foremost amongst these is the stress he constantly laid upon social and political institutions. No political writer ever valued institutions more. There used to be a significant emphasis in the very way in which he pronounced the word. And we have partly seen the reason why. For like Burke, for whom he had a profound admiration, he saw in his country's institutions, as we have seen, no mere secular product of many human minds and many human wills, but rather the results of the action of that universal Spirit—that “Divine tactic,” as Burke called it—which, through the instrumentality of human wills, operates throughout the whole history and growth of states.

Yet it is not for this reason solely, or even mainly, that he values institutions. Be it family, or property, or political party, or church, or legal system, or charitable organisation, the value of each and all turns finally on what it does, and promises to do, for the lives of citizens. No one could be less disposed to turn an institution into an end in itself, no matter how imposing its history, or more disposed to insist that institutions exist for men and not men for institutions.

He joins hands here with the Utilitarian radicals. Like them his face is to the future. Like them his eye is on results. Like them he believes that institutions exist for men. Like them he magnifies the Public Good. Barring its hedonism against which he waged a lifelong war, he does generous justice to the practical value of utilitarianism as a political creed.* But there

* “Political Obligation,” section 23, and “Prolegomena to Ethics,” sections 213 and 356.

is a difference. For whereas with it the emphasis is laid on happiness, with Green it lies unmistakably upon the development of individual character. "The value of the institutions of civil life," he says in his "Principles of Political Obligation," "lies in their operation as giving reality to the capacities of will and reason and enabling them to be really exercised . . . So far as they do in fact thus operate they are morally justified." *

This is a characteristic passage. It touches one of his strongest convictions—the conviction that institutions justify their existence only in and so far as they live in the lives of men or (if the phrase is permissible) are born again and ever-again in the souls of citizens. It is needful doctrine, because it is so constantly forgotten. For "institutions" is a word which sets the mind running to buildings, officials, endowments, charters, constitutions; perhaps also founders, records and traditions. Well and good. But these things do not constitute an institution in its essence. They may all be there in institutions that are antiquated, decaying or dead. One thing is still lacking—the life, the spiritual bond. For the essence of an institution, be it a friendly society, a political club, a charitable organisation, a learned society, is that it is the material embodiment of some settled plan, end, or purpose in which many minds and many wills unite and find a meeting-ground for action. It is not even by what it does for the world outside of it, much as this may be, that we ought to estimate an institution. The still more conclusive criterion lies in what it is doing for the wills and characters of those who, in union of thought,

* "Political Obligation," section 7.

sentiment and purpose, *are* the institution through participation in its life.*

It is after this fashion that Green regards institutions. He vitalises them. He humanises them. He moralises them. As we read his pages they cease to be mere pieces of social structure or bits of social mechanism. They become instinct with life and will. Nor is it ever enough to prove that they exist for the Public Good or the Greatest Happiness, though that is much to be able to say, not, at any rate, till we are able to translate these large abstractions into terms of the concrete good of individual citizens who already or in days to come will stand upon the earth. The Common Good is doubtless an imposing phrase, and Green constantly makes use of it. So is Greatest Happiness. So is Humanity. They have all done duty often enough as watchwords and generalisations. Nor is there any reason why they should cease to do so. But let no one think that he understands what they truly are as actual objects of value, endeavour and sacrifice, till he has learnt to look through the symbolism of the terms and to see behind them the lives of men.

This is the essence of Green's teaching here. It comes to light decisively in the "Prolegomena to Ethics," where he is discussing the nature of the ultimate end. The suggestion is there made that the ultimate end is the good of the nation. In a sense Green does not dispute it. He was convinced that no life worth living is possible without institutions, and that the life most worth living is that which finds at once its nurture and its sphere of realisation in that

* See on this subject a peculiarly interesting chapter in Bosanquet's "Theory of the State" on "Institutions considered as ethical ideas," cf. also c. vii. of the same work.

supreme institution, the organised State. As disciple of Aristotle and Hegel he was quick to see that "the individual" becomes an abstract figment if set over against society in a spurious independence and impossible isolation. The comparatively atomic individualism of Mill is far from him. But he was equally convinced that the nation in its turn is an abstraction no less delusive, if it be erected into an end in itself in forgetfulness or subordination of the individual lives which in organised union *are* the nation. His words leave us in no uncertainty. "The life of the nation," he writes, "has no real existence except as the life of the individuals composing the nation." Or again, in words that are even stronger, as they are more sweeping, "To speak of any progress or improvement or development of a nation or society or mankind except as relative to some greater worth of persons, is to use words without meaning."* A nation, it is true, and even a specific institution within a nation, may call upon the citizen to sacrifice himself, even to life itself. Green was the last man to dispute it. Nor was there any reason in his doctrine why he should. Contrariwise. For the justification of such sacrifices never terminates in the added wealth, power, prestige, or stability the nation may gain by them. All these things, like "the nation" which they characterise, are themselves abstractions, eviscerated of their real content until they are translated into terms of betterment for persons somewhere and somehow. The truth is that, according to the teaching of the "Prolegomena," there is but one place in which, by reason of its very nature, the ultimate good for man can reside, because there is but one place in which it can find realisation, and that is in the wills

* "Prolegomena to Ethics," section 184.

and characters of individuals. For the good, as Green conceives it, is a spiritual good, a dutiful attitude of will, a right state of character, and however many the material conditions it may need as its instruments, it is in the lives of men and women that it can alone find its dwelling-place. This is the ultimate ground of what we may fitly call Green's individualism. It has no kinship with the individualism that suggests an attitude of hostility to governmental interference, nor with the impossible individualism of "self-regarding acts" as taught by Mill, nor with the individualism implied in the Benthamite conception of society as an aggregate of units. Yet if it be individualism to see habitually in every political movement the fate of human beings, and in every controversy over institutions the weal or woe of fellow citizens, then there are few more declared individualists in political philosophy than Green.

This is doctrine which democracy can ill afford to forget. The political world is all too apt, falling a prey to metaphor, to speak of the national spirit, the national sentiment, the national conscience, the national will, as if a nation (and even humanity) were actually a person that could think and feel. It is wholesome to be reminded that a national sentiment must be felt by individuals or must cease to exist, and that a national will becomes real only when actualised in the concrete wills of citizens. A "national will," it is true, is not a mere aggregate of individual wills (as Rousseau reminds us). "Aggregate" is not the word for the organised union of a civilised people. Yet it remains the fact that it is in and through the wills of persons, despite all their vagaries and futilities, that a nation's will finds its substance and its force.

It is one thing, however, thus to insist that institutions exist for men and live in their minds and characters: it is another to believe that institutions ought to be democratic. And it is, of course, just this latter point that most concerns us in the philosophy of Green. For that these two things may be dissevered is proved by a supreme instance.

Where did political institutions more intensely vitalise the lives of citizens, and where did the wills and sentiments of citizens more intensely vitalise political institutions than in ancient Athens—Athens where at least four to one of the population were, as slaves and chattels, shut out from the constitution altogether, and where, therefore, one of the institutions that vitalised the lives of the privileged minority, was the institution of slavery?

Now, greatly as Green admired the civic spirit of Greece, it is not to be supposed that he was prepared to follow even Plato and Aristotle here. Hence his problem, which is also our problem, to wit: How to unite the intense civic spirit of the ancient world with modern democratic aspirations? How realise under modern conditions that organic union between the citizen and civic institutions which made Athens great and free? Political institutions are much, to no writer are they more than they are to Green, but why must they be democratic? Why must they exist not for caste or class (as they did in those so-called "democracies" of Greece), but for the rank and file, irrespective of caste, class, or creed?

Now it is not necessary to claim for Green that he approached this problem in the dry light of the understanding only. On the contrary, it lies on the surface of his life that his personal sympathies were strongly democratic. "The noblest feature of his character,"

says one of his friends, was "a serious sympathy with the wrongs and sufferings of the poor." Not only did he hate slavery with a perfect hatred and glory in its extinction in America, even at price of bloody civil war, his sympathies were not less stirred by the spectacle of the "untaught and underfed denizen of a London yard, with gin-shops on the right-hand and on the left." He had nothing short of a horror of the growth of a degraded and poverty-stricken proletariat. Another friend remarks upon his "love for social equality" and "his sense of the dignity of simple human nature." It was especially to "plain people," says still another intimate, "to people of the middle and lower class rather than of the upper" that he was drawn. The blot he most detested in English society was its pervading flunkeyism. Never, we may add, was there a man freer from the foolish fancied superiorities which sometimes education arrogates over the uncultured. It was not even genius (though no one reverenced genius more) that most drew his sympathies. It was character. It was "the good neighbour and honest citizen." He was a man who always believed and taught that neither class, culture, nor creed should divide men. "Those of us," he once said in an address to university men, "to whom university life is an avenue to the great world, would do well betimes to seek opportunities of co-operation with those simple Christians whose creed, though we may not be able exactly to adopt it, is to them the natural expression of a spirit which at the bottom of our heart we recognise as higher than our own. In the everyday life of Christian citizenship, in its struggle against ignorance and vice, such opportunities are readily forthcoming." *

* "Works," vol. iii. p. 276. Address on "Faith."

But of course it was not upon sympathies that Green's democratic doctrine was built. The entire drift of his essay on "Popular Philosophy in Relation to Life" is to tear the mask from the philosophies of Feeling that ended logically in the destructive sentimentalism of Rousseau. In life we may feel, but in philosophy we must think. And the appeal of Green, as thinker, is to reason. He believed in democracy because he thought he could give reasons for the democratic faith that was in him. He sometimes demurred to be called Hegelian, he even explicitly avowed his divergence from Hegelianism.* But he was certainly Hegelian to the core in his appeal to reason.

For Green substantially accepted what we might call the great magna charta of democracy as this stands written in the philosophy of Kant. With Kant, he believes that every man, as a being endowed with reason and will, is indefeasibly entitled to respect; not the emotional respect which it may be quite beyond our power to feel for very many members of the community, but the *practical* respect which invests the persons to whom it is paid with the title always to be dealt with as ends in themselves, and never to be dealt with, like slaves or chattels, as mere means to the ends of others. That every person possesses a worth and dignity which forbids his exploitation for political or any other ends—this is the doctrine of Green as it is of Kant.

There are, however, differences. It is the well-known limitation of Kant that he fails to do justice to human feelings and desires. The respect which is

* "Works," vol. iii. p. 143.

due from man to man would, on his view, be better described, as indeed it is described by him, as respect for the august moral law, the law of duty for duty's sake, which every good man is supposed consciously to exemplify. As for natural feelings, inclinations, desires, aspirations, there is nothing in *them* particularly to move us to respect. This is his fatal flaw. Kant wished to improve upon Rousseau, with whom he seems at one time to have been in strong accord. He was dissatisfied with feeling as the root of personality. And so he turned to reason. But in turning to reason he turned away from the natural man altogether and declared for an asceticism that magnified reason by trampling on the desires and feelings. With Green it is otherwise. *His* analysis of Will is different. On no point is he firmer or more insistent than that in human feeling and desire as such, and therefore in the natural feelings and desires of men however rude and uncultivated, there lie the germs or potentialities of those higher moral powers of will and conscience to which, when we find them in their maturity, we dare not withhold recognition and respect. Green constantly returns to this point. He is insistent almost to weariness in his contention that between the merely animal appetites and the desires and feelings of a human being there is a world of difference. And the difference lies in this: that in the desires and feelings even of the slave and the savage the eye of analysis can discern—as it never can discern in the appetites of animals—the first faint beginnings and far-off promise which, under the civilising influence of sound institutions, can finally be transformed into civic character. It is in this light that Green always regards both the less developed races, and the less

developed members of a civilised community. He is resolute to look at them always as they are. He is under no illusions about them. He knew their frailties and their follies. His eye is the eye of the analyst. But in looking at them as they are, he insists upon judging them and estimating them in the light of what they have in them to become. For that surely is also part, is it not in truth the most important part, of what they are? And it is because he thus regards them with the eye at once of the analyst and the idealist that he bids us render even to the humblest of our species that same practical respect which we never think of withholding when, thanks to the civilising influences of free institutions, the potentialities of the savage and the slave have become the realised morality of the good neighbour and honest citizen.

This is the justification of Green's broad and unfaltering democratic sympathies. We said he hated slavery. Why? Because he saw in the slave neither animated chattel nor serviceable animal, but the marring of a moral and social being. We saw he had a horror of a proletariat. He well might. A proletariat could be nothing else in his eyes but an index of the failure of civilisation. We saw he had as a salient feature of his character a sympathy with the wrongs and sufferings of the poor. But it was not the facile sympathy of pity, far less the degrading twice-cursed sympathy of patronage. It was the rational and practical sympathy which regarded grinding poverty, squalor, disease, thriftlessness, drunkenness, and vice in all its forms, as deplorable obstructions to that decent and self-respecting life of citizenship by the capacity for which the man is decisively differentiated

from the brute. Green was far from unappreciative of the sympathy of sentiment, though he had an intense repugnance to sentimentality, but it was not enough. For his was the sympathy of a profoundly matter-of-fact yet ever-aspiring nature which worked for popular causes because not all the brutalisation of savagery or slavery, nor all the degradation of civilised cities could shake his analytic estimate of what human nature had it in it to become. It was matter-of-fact idealism—that kind of idealism which believes that in beings capable of development the far results are the true realities, which can see in beginnings the prophecy of ends, and in potentialities the promise of actualities, or (to translate abstract terms into more concrete phrase) which can see in a country ditcher or a dock-labourer the makings of a citizen.

Nor must we forget that there is a further point which, though it marks a decided divergence from Kant, nevertheless strengthens Green in his agreement with the Kantian doctrine of the worth and dignity of the individual. Though far from hostile to theism, Kant is peculiarly jealous of anything that implies dependence of the human will on God. Such dependence seems to him to imperil that "autonomy of the will" which he takes to be of the essence of morality. Far otherwise with Green. To him the dependence of the finite spirit upon God is fundamental. It is the source of all consolation, aspiration and hope. It is the prime condition of that belief in ideals, and that salutary contrast between the ideal and the actual in which, as we have said, lies the nerve of progress.

This being so, Green falls at once into line with those thinkers whose radicalism is religious. "Religious radical" is what Nettleship calls him. Nor can

there be a doubt that the designation fits. For it is evident that to Green, as to Mazzini (with whom he is upon so many points at one), respect for men is inseparably interwoven with the belief that mankind in their "divine discontent," in their spiritual cravings for betterment, in their service of ideals, "participate" (the Platonic metaphor is also Green's) in the very life of God. Mazzini's watchword "God and the People" is perhaps not a phrase which Green would have cared to use. The reasoning sobriety of his thought is in marked contrast to the unrestrained intuitive appeal of Mazzini. But no reader can doubt that upon his own grounds he was in profound sympathy with that watchword of the great political saint of Italy.

We are now in a position better to understand why to his belief in the value of institutions Green added the belief that the benefits of institutions must be extended to all. Saturated with the civic spirit of the political thinkers of Greece; confirmed in it by the Hegelian doctrine (drawn largely from Greece) that it is by losing himself in the life of citizenship that the individual truly finds himself; convinced, therefore, if he was convinced of anything, that the lives of men are atrophied when civil and political rights are denied them, he felt constrained to work for "the coming of the day when all the Lord's people should be 'prophets,' or, in less metaphorical language, when the English artisan and agricultural labourer, stigmatised by the foes of democracy as "roughs" and "clowns," would prove their capacity for the manly virtues that thrive upon the soil of active citizenship. In 1868 Green made a speech in Oxford about the recently extended franchise. He refused to view it in any narrow spirit as a gain for his party, or as the forging

of a political instrument for realising further reforms. He took higher, stronger ground.

"We who were reformers from the beginning always said that the enfranchisement of the people was an end in itself. We said, and we were much derided for saying so, that citizenship only makes the moral man; that citizenship only gives that self-respect which is the true basis of respect of others, and without which there is no lasting social order or real morality."* And to the waverers, the doubters, the alarmists who have never since the beginning been wanting to all extensions of popular liberties, he has a short answer. "Untie the man's legs, and then it will be time to speculate how he will walk."

Henry Sidgwick, in a recently published posthumous volume, has criticised Green severely for reading into his interpretation of the Aristotelian virtues (especially the virtues of Courage and Self-control) more of the civic spirit than is to be found in Aristotle himself.† Be it so. We cannot now stop to argue the point, even though we may venture to suggest that the criticism is controvertible. Let us welcome it as, at any rate, a proof that we have here an English Aristotle more civic in spirit than even that Greek Aristotle who declared that man was "by nature a citizen" and who above all others has taught mankind that the moral salvation of the individual lies in the life of citizenship.

If there are those to whom this democratic faith seems all too sanguine and even visionary, they may, at any rate rest assured that Green was not the man

* Memoir, p. cxii. in "Works," vol. iii.

† Cf. "The Ethics of T. H. Green," &c. Lecture VI. especially, pp. 90-93.

to underrate misgivings or to deny that these have grounds. If we call him optimist, his optimism was neither so glowing as Mazzini's nor so elastic as Mill's. He was "cautious of putting down his foot." He was not a visionary. Sober-mindedness, as we have seen, was a note of his character. He was not romantic. His outlook on life was subdued, even to sadness. He saw with a penetrating and pitying eye into the mixed motives, the egotisms, the weaknesses and meannesses of mankind. But the result was not misgivings as to his ideals, for that would have meant a repudiation of his whole philosophy, but the recognition of the fact that their realisation meant work and sacrifice.

There is a way of talking of democracy as if it had nothing to do but to give, as if political liberties were boons, gifts or largesses, and the democratic citizen a beneficiary of blessings which free institutions showered upon his head. It may not be entirely false. But, only too often, it disastrously hides the fact that under democratic institutions it is the citizen who gives most who gets most. Not in the whole circle of institutions, from the family onwards, is there one which will render up its benefits except to the citizen who gives his best and his utmost to active civic service. It is so with the humblest political club. Little it gives, and sometimes less than nothing, to its members unless they strive for the causes for which it exists. So with a great municipality. It is not the passive citizen who gains most of what his city has to give, even when he is well governed and lightly rated. It is the men who play their part, the active citizens who widen and enrich their lives through interest and work in public causes. This holds throughout, from

the service of a vestry to that of an empire. It is active citizenship alone that reaps the harvest. Nor is it the commonwealth that is most defrauded by the political indifference and private selfishness deplored of moralists, which are ready to take everything and render nothing in return. The commonwealth can thrive without its drones. The certain losers are the men themselves in whose self-centred and contracted lives such private virtues as may come will but poorly compensate for the lack of civic courage, political integrity, public spirit, political comradeship, patriotism. Shining, indeed, would the private virtues and graces of life need to be if they were to be accepted in full as the equivalent of the manly qualities which are born and bred only of active citizenship.

This, at any rate, is the political message of Green. It is not enough for him that men should be loyal citizens: he would have them become "intelligent patriots" in whom an appreciation of social ends has awakened a passion to serve their country. "If the individual is to have a higher feeling of political duty"—so runs his demand—"he must take part in the work of the State."* For it was not the *gift* of citizenship he really valued; it was the use to be made of the gift. It was not even the popular causes for the sake of which he shortened his own days; it was the evolution of civic character which he believed the

* "Political Obligation," section 122. In the context he adds: "The citizens of the Roman Empire were loyal subjects; the admirable maintenance of private rights made them that; but they were not intelligent patriots, and chiefly because they were not, the Empire fell. That active interest in the service of the State, which makes patriotism in the better sense, can hardly arise while the individual's relation to the State is that of a passive recipient of protection in the exercise of his rights of person and property."

pursuit of these causes carried in its train. Nor was it upon democracy as an instrument for redressing wrongs and deposing privilege and monopoly, or as a form of government, that his heart was chiefly set; it was on democracy as a state of social relations in which respect would have become the normal attitude of man to man because then the citizen would have proved his title to respect by his civic spirit and civic service.

This will be clearer if we turn from these generalities to two more specific applications of Green's doctrine. And, first, to his justification of rights.

The central feature in Green's theory of civil and political rights is that it rests on his doctrine of political duty. This comes out in his comments on the old revolutionary doctrine of "natural rights," "the rights of man," of which Rousseau was the parent and Paine the prophet. His remark about these men is that they were so taken up with innate rights that they somehow seemed to have forgotten innate duties. And though we must not press this to mean that Green thought that any man is born into the world with a code of duties all complete—for this would be just as dogmatic as the dogmatism of rights—it is still significant of the conviction that of the two conceptions Right and Duty, it is Duty that is the more fundamental of the two. To say "Nature or God (with the apostles of the Rights of Man it was sometimes one and sometimes the other) gives me rights and therefore it is your duty to respect them" is a strong statement. But it is (to say the least) neither so strong nor so much in harmony with fact as to say "Nature or God has given me the capacity for Duty, and in order to get my duty done I claim my rights."

And it is just this that is Green's (as it is Kant's) contention. He is not content to *claim* rights. Any-one can do that. And it does not better the claim one whit when it is made in the name of Nature or God. What is needful is proof—proof that the claims are just and reasonable. Green is at one with Bentham here. It is proof he seeks to give; and he finds it, not indeed where Bentham finds it,* but in the argument that when any man is denied his rights, to that man the capacity to do his duty is frustrate and abortive, because, without rights, a human being lacks the opportunities which lie upon the very threshold of moral development and the dutiful life. It is the same point that has emerged throughout. For it is not because Green ever thinks that the right to life, or to property, or to reputation, or the right to vote or any other right civil or political, is an end in itself that he argues through many pages for rights. Here, as elsewhere, he is idealist. He argues for rights in the light of what he believes men have it in them through rights to become. For it is not in the origin of man—for that is lowly and brutish enough—but in his moral destiny which is neither lowly nor brutish, that he finds the true justification of rights. It is upon the inherent capacities of the human spirit for social duties, it is upon the consciousness of spiritual cravings which claim kindred with the Source of all good that all Green's argument turns. For rights are not gifts, nor boons, nor congenital possessions. They are simply opportunities, or advantages, or positions for the exercise of powers, in which the members of a community, in the pursuit of a common good, struggle

*See p. 13.

on to be secured by the sanctions of law or custom, in order that upon that assured standing-ground they may begin to fulfil those duties, and thereby to realise those ideals which are of the essence of man as a moral and religious being. "True rights," so runs his definition, "are powers which it is for the general well-being that the individual (or association) should possess, and that well-being is essentially a moral well-being." *

It is not often that the philosophical justification of human struggles and aspirations furnishes mankind with fresh incentives. It seems an accepted commonplace that, at the very touch of philosophical analysis and explanation, the glow and passion of life evaporate. And Green himself was among the thinkers who are quick, perhaps too quick, to disclaim the notion that discourses about morality can make men more moral or theories in politics make better citizens. Nor is anyone likely to find in the severely reasoned pages of the "Principles of Political Obligation" any of the rhetorical appeal that is usually supposed necessary to stir and sustain the passion for reform. And yet, when one rises from Green's pages, and passes in review all the motives that have inspired the long struggle for rights—the sting of oppression, the sense of injustice, the hatred of class for class, the hunger for independence, the longing for security, the craving for power, the pursuit of happiness—one wonders if all of them put together can furnish a thinking man with

* "Political Obligation," section 206. Compare section 154, "There can be no claim on society such as constitutes a right, except in respect of a capacity freely to contribute to its good." Also section 208, "A right is a power of acting for his own ends, for what he conceives to be his good, secured to an individual by the community, on the supposition that its exercise contributes to the good of the community."

a stronger incentive to work for his own rights and the rights of his fellow citizens, than this philosopher's reasoned proof that he who is content to take less than his rights is a moral apostate, because he is consenting to be denied the bare elementary conditions of that life of dutiful self-realisation through civic functions which parts the free citizen from the slave.

The same line of thought lies also at the root of Green's conception of freedom.

Democracy has won emancipation. Has it not emancipated the slave, the artisan, the peasant? But emancipation is not freedom; it is but a step towards it. For whereas emancipation may come at a stroke, freedom has to be earned by all its sons. Only those can win it who have proved that they deserve it. Nor will it ever come, because in truth it cannot come in reality and substance and not merely in name and form, till the mere escape from thraldom, much as that is, has been followed up by the positive and satisfying fruition of what the life of liberty has to give. As with emancipation, so with rights. The possession of rights is not freedom. This was the message of Green as it was of Mazzini.* For actual freedom is found only in that satisfying fulfilment of civic duties to which rights, however precious, are but the vestibule. This is the characteristic view of Green. His eye is always on *substantial* freedom. It is not free institutions alone, nor rights alone, nor immunity from interference alone, that can satisfy him. Nothing will satisfy him but the fuller and better life into which the citizen comes when all these preliminaries have opened the way. His definition of freedom shows this. Carlyle

* See p. 191.

and Mazzini were wont to say that freedom stood in need of new definitions. Green gives us one. Freedom is "a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that too something that we do or enjoy in common with others."* This does but reveal in another form the same spirit we have seen running through all his thought, the same unwillingness to rest in abstractions, the same refusal to accept form for substance, the same passion for what is concrete, actual, real. To him the only genuine freeman is the fully-developed man and citizen, and all who come short of this are still but freemen in the making.

Hence his attitude on a question that has now for some time divided the radical camp, and seems fated to divide it more, the vexed question of State intervention. It is Green's merit here to steer steadily a course of his own. He is neither for State intervention, like the socialist, nor against it, like Bright and Cobden. But this comes not of compromise, but of principle; and it is, above all, determined by his conception of freedom. The end on which his eye is, here as elsewhere, fixed is the development of the character of the citizen, "the power on the part of all men equally to make the most and the best of themselves." Show that State intervention hinders this, and he will repudiate it with more than the antipathy of Cobden. Show that it is thwarted or delayed by *laissez-faire*, and he hesitates not a moment to set *laissez-faire* aside as a thing whose day is done despite all the cherished traditions of the Manchester School. His favourite formula here is "removal of obstructions," and if we went

* "Liberal legislation and freedom of contract." "Works" iii. p. 171.

no further than the phrase he might seem to be but echoing the counsels of Cobden. Yet the difference is decisive. For it is not of the number or the magnitude of legal restraints he thinks first of all. Drastic legal intervention does not disconcert him in the least. The whole question for him turns on the issue whether legal restraints, be they few or many, make for that fuller and richer life of citizenship which constitutes a positive and substantial freedom. "Removal of obstructions" is a phrase which on his pages must always be interpreted in the light of his recognition of the individual capacities, potentialities and ideals which are pressing for development. We can see this in a crucial instance. The national vice which he most deplored was drunkenness, and the control of the liquor traffic was the question upon which, above all others, he probably felt most intensely. His practical conclusion is not left doubtful. "This, then," he says, in the reasoning Address upon "Liberal legislation and freedom of contract," which he delivered in 1881 (it was one of his latest utterances)—"This then, along with the effective liberation of the soil, is the next great conquest which our democracy, on behalf of its own true freedom, has to make. The danger of legislation either in the interests of a privileged class or for the promotion of particular religious opinions, we may fairly assume to be over. The popular jealousy of law, once justifiable enough, is therefore out of date. The citizens of England now make its law. We ask them by law to put a restraint on themselves in the matter of strong drink. We ask them further to limit, or even altogether to give up, the not very precious liberty of buying and selling alcohol, in order that they may become more free to

exercise the faculties and improve the talents which God has given them.” *

This utterance has an application far beyond the question that evoked it. For Green was ready to welcome with a warmth which would have scandalised Bright, or Cobden, or Spencer, all democratic legislation which would sweep out of the path of the citizen the malign obstructions that come of ignorance, disease, squalor, culpable carelessness and fraud, as well as drunkenness. Factory Acts, Education Acts, Adulteration Acts, Irish Land Acts met with his vehement approval. They implied compulsions, and of course he knew it. But then he was not averse that, under a democratic regime, his fellow citizens should (to use Rousseau’s phrase) be legally “ forced to be free,” provided that the action of the law went out to meet moral and civic potentialities which were genuinely struggling to find a fuller realisation than was possible under the fancied “ liberty ” but real bondage of a *laissez-faire* dispensation. So far as one can see, he did not share Mill’s dread of the possible tyranny of the majority. Or if he did—and he was not blind to what he once called “ the real greatness ” of Mill—misgivings were overcome by his confidence in the democratic State.

And yet he was far enough from being prepared to give the State *carte blanche*. It would certainly be a misnomer to call him, in any accurate signification, “ socialistic.” His justification of the right of private property carries with it quite explicitly a strong plea for private capital. Keenly sympathetic with the cause of Labour, and acutely alive to the dangers and the degradation that accompany the growth of an im-

* “ Works,” vol. iii. p. 386.

poverished proletariat, he yet declines, he calls it "unfair," to lay upon capitalism the admitted evils for which socialism offers itself as a remedy. Equality of wealth is no part of his ideal. It is incompatible with it. For as private property is on his view justified because it is an instrument for the realisation of human capacities, nothing can be more reasonable than that the inevitable inequalities of capacity which diversify the face of society should find their counterpart in inequalities of riches even to the length of large accumulations in private hands. He has therefore no misgivings as to the spectacle of the large fortunes that are incidents of trade. His misgivings awaken only when he comes to property in land. For he turns the very arguments which justify what he calls "the free development of individual wealth" in other things, into an indictment of an equally uncontrolled ownership of land. For he could not think that landlordism in its present form (at any rate in England) was fitted to foster free citizenship. On the contrary, he was convinced that by monopolising a commodity definitely limited in amount, it had gone far to sacrifice the landless many to the landed few. Nor can there be a doubt that he was what would be usually called an agrarian radical. But he did not attack private property in land. He did not wish for State proprietorship. He did not consider even the appropriation of the unearned increment "though fair enough in itself" as desirable. He argued for nothing more radical than a legal control over the landed interest so that tenant farmer and more especially agricultural labourer might better realise the right to free life.* Socialism,

* See "Political Obligation," div. N. "The right of the State in regard to property."

however, was not a subject upon which Green directly expressed himself, and his judgment on it (he could hardly have left a more valuable legacy to radicalism) must remain partly matter of conjecture.

But be this as it may, it is certain enough that none of all our political writers has held stronger views as to the inevitable limitations to State intervention in some of the gravest concerns of life. This comes out in his exposure of the impotence of law *directly* to promote either religion or morality.

His point here is substantially the same as that already urged in criticism of Mill.* It turns on the spirituality of his conception of human life. For this leads him to a plea for *laissez-faire* which is more thorough-going, though less undiscriminating, than that of even Bright and Cobden. His argument is that no State authority, be its sanctions never so compulsive, can produce that attitude of the individual soul to God without which all genuine religion vanishes; and just as little can it create that inward dutiful state of will without which conduct cannot rise above the low level of a meagre moral legality. It is as impotent here as it is in the domain of speculative thought and philosophical belief. Outward conformity of course it may secure, if its sanctions be sufficiently formidable, but the maximum of outward conformity may fail altogether to ensure the minimum of genuine religion and real morality. He goes further. For he is so jealous for sincerity and purity of motive that he sounds a warning note against attempts to enforce even such moral and religious actions as might be within the competence of the law. For however unexceptionable

* See above, p. 79, *et seq.*

such actions might be, they would, he fears, drop at once in moral worth through the vitiation of the springs of action which is apt to come whenever the doing of right actions is even partially due to fear of punishment. On similar grounds he has a deep distrust of anything approaching inquisitorial intervention of law in family life. It is not that he is in the least disposed to clothe the heads of households with any fancied rights of domestic despotism. He was willing enough to compel parents to educate children. His reason lies in the conviction that the family tie as it ought to be is so much a matter of mutual trust, sympathy and affection that it is an ultimate impossibility to do much for it by attempting to regulate by law, beyond narrow limits, the intimate, delicate relations of husband and wife or parent and child.* This is a line of thought that imposes by far the most effective limits upon the functions of government. For it is not for government, though it be the wisest and strongest that ever shaped itself before the political imagination, to try to create the spiritual and moral life of its citizens. Its function is the more modest and more practicable task of "removing obstructions" to the development of lives fed and nurtured on higher things. The claim to the helping hand of the State, so freely and often so reasonably made in these latter days, is only justified if those on whose behalf the claim is made have within them powers and cravings which the State can indeed help to satisfy but which it does not create. It is in proportion as these powers and cravings are likely to come out to

* "Political Obligation," section 18. "The true ground of objection to paternal government is not that it violates the *laissez-faire* principle," &c.

meet what public action does to help them that the intervention of the State becomes justifiable. The helping hand of government must find the responsive grasp of real needs and genuine potentialities. This is the truth that underlies the formula "removal of obstructions." The formula, to be sure, is not faultless. It is not easy to find a place in it for every instance in which the action of public authorities is generally welcomed. When, for example, one has wandered amongst the treasures of a British Museum, or even visited a well-equipped public elementary school, or crept from under the smoke of city streets to a green and leafy public park, it is not enough to reflect that these things mean "removal of obstructions," the lamentable obstructions that come of ignorance or of dreary and debilitating surroundings. They also positively feed and nurture the instincts for knowledge and delight, nor is it desirable to withhold from civic enterprise the incentives that come from that reflection. After all, however, the issue here is largely verbal. Let those who can improve upon Green's formula.* Meanwhile the central point remains that whatever the State or the municipality may in the future do for the citizen, it will be but as water spilt on sand if the men of the democracy do not bring to the appropriation of it that real desire for betterment and that genuine aspiration after the life of the good neighbour and honest citizen of which this truly philosophical radical was the prophet.

* Professor Bosanquet prefers the phrase "hindrance of hindrances," and supports it with his wonted penetrating analysis (see "Philosophical Theory of the State" c. viii p. 196.) But this formula, too, seems hardly adequate.

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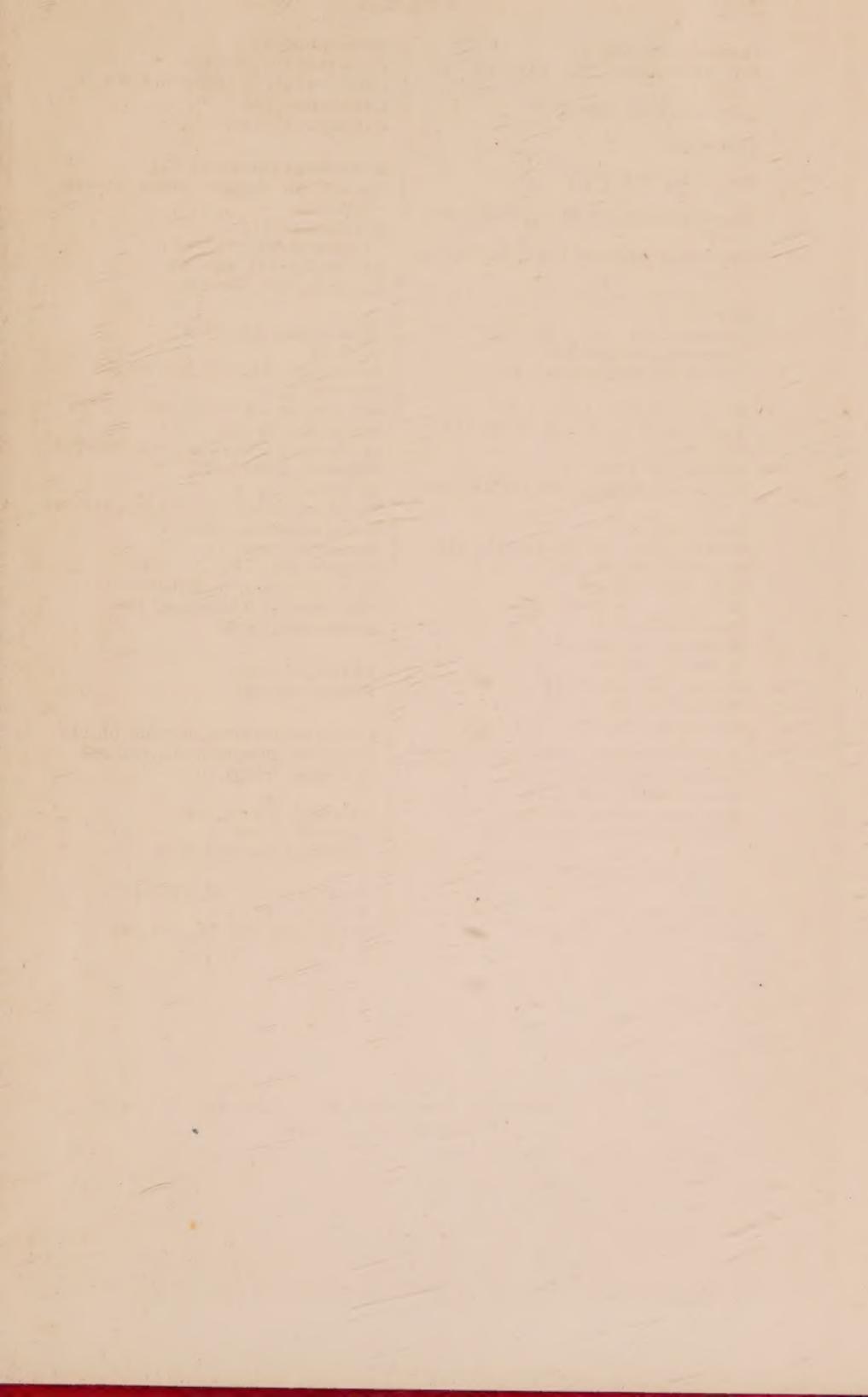
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